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University of Glasgow

**‘Une aventure novele est en cele sale venue’: dynamics of
narrative, people and place in Old French literature**

By Eilidh Macdonald

Thesis submitted to the College of Arts (School of Modern Languages and
Cultures) in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis analyses twelfth- and thirteenth-century French texts from a range of genres to demonstrate how the inter-relation of narrative and place is a catalyst for the production of vernacular literary works. Rooted in close criticism of the texts in question (the *Roman d'Eneas*, lives of the martyrs Christina of Tyre and Catherine of Alexandria, the *Voyage de saint Brendan*, lives of the ascetics Alexis and Mary of Egypt, and the *Roman de Brut*), this study examines the ways in which narration both generates and delimits place. In tandem with this it interrogates the representations of, and disturbances to, the spatial organization of these texts, encompassing such themes as empire-building, genealogy, travel and exile. This juxtaposition of diverse materials opens up mutually illuminating spaces, demonstrating the instability of the entrenched generic categories applied to them and prompting consideration of the ambiguous principles of medieval poetic craft. Hagiography is a particularly pertinent crossing-point for multiple thematic concerns, from the tension between revelation and concealment of the body to the relationship between a state and its citizens. Its location at the confluence of liturgy, lay spirituality and entertainment makes it an apt focus for a study such as this. The thesis also considers questions of cultural and political appropriation and re-appropriation of place, drawing on medieval writers' and thinkers' conflicted relationship with their classical antecedents and non-Christian 'others'. The many and varied journeys undertaken in these texts, meanwhile, offer critical meeting points between practices of writing about place across a range of modes, and they invite consideration of the historical contexts for their production. Foremost in this study, however, is a concern with the ways in which medieval narratives reify story; through close attention to how narratives are produced, preserved and transmitted in these texts, I examine the ethics and efficacy of storytelling as a means for creating place. Whether they re-present foundation myths, the trials of saints, or the fantastical journeys of adventurers, these stories are both container and content for reflections on how authors can relate to their world, and it is this sense of the two faces of narrative that underpins my interpretation of these texts and their representations of places and spaces.

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The perspective of the aesthetics of reception mediates between passive reception and active understanding, experience formative of norms, and new production. If the history of literature is viewed in this way within the horizon of a dialogue between work and audience that forms a continuity, the opposition between its aesthetic and its historical aspects is also continually mediated. Thus the thread from the past appearance to the present experience of literature, which historicism had cut, is tied back together.

Hans-Robert Jauss, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', p. 19.

Le coffre, le coffret, surtout, dont on prend une plus entière maîtrise, sont des *objets qui s'ouvrent*. Quand le coffret se ferme, il est rendu à la communauté des objets; il prend sa place dans l'espace extérieur. Mais il s'ouvre! [...] Au moment où le coffret s'ouvre, plus de dialectique. Le dehors est rayé d'un trait, tout est à la nouveauté, à la surprise, à l'inconnu. Le dehors ne signifie plus rien.

When a casket is closed, it is returned to the general community of objects ; it takes its place in exterior space. But it opens! [...] From the moment the casket is opened, dialectics no longer exist. The outside is effaced with one stroke, an atmosphere of novelty and surprise reigns. The outside has no more meaning.

Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, p. 88.
(trans. by Maria Jolas)

Introduction

Between the *coffret* and the horizon

This thesis examines the treatment and traffic of stories and storytellers in narrative works, and explores the potential and limitations of the notion of ‘portable narrative’, a phenomenon I conceive of as being comparable with Bachelard’s *coffret* (casket), insofar as narrative can both belong to the world of objects and illuminate the world in which it is found at the same time as destabilizing boundary definitions. My study uses texts from a range of genres to identify how the acts of storytelling and interpretation are shaped by narrators, their audiences and their awareness of place. Place is understood in several ways in my readings of these texts – geographical, architectural, political, genealogical – but all of these ways of reading for place share a concern with how subjects, and particularly storytelling subjects, locate themselves in relation to their worlds. In focusing on these activities, I draw on Hans-Robert Jauss’s reception theory to explore how the narrative place (as represented in and constituted by the texts in question) can be understood both as portable container and as infinitely re-workable content.¹ Narrative may be seen to constitute a third type of location between space and place, resisting Yi-Fu Tuan’s assertion that while the former is characterized by mobility, the latter represents stasis: ‘Place is a special kind of object. It is a concretion of value, though not a valued thing that can be handled or carried about easily; it is an object in which one can dwell’.² My argument is that narrative can combine elements of both place and space, opening opportunities for creativity and rhetorical flourish at the same time as anchoring identities and establishing histories.

The study concentrates on texts which draw upon pre-existing material at varying chronological removes from the period of composition; in so doing it aims to examine how close the boundaries within narrative come to the boundaries between author and

¹ Christopher Baswell’s study of the reception of Virgil notes tendencies similar to these in his living cultural legacy during the Middle Ages: ‘constant, though inexplicit, is the ambition to mastery, we may even say to authority, among certain retellers of the Virgilian story as they struggle with the competing exegetical, narrative, and social claims laid upon that Ur-auctor.’ Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England: Figuring the Aeneid from the twelfth century to Chaucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 24 (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1995), p. 270.

² Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 12.

text, narrator and narrative. This selection includes continental and Anglo-Norman works, and the study will interrogate how the circumstances of their composition and transmission are interlaced with their representation of distant times and far-off lands. The juxtaposition of hagiographic, romance and pseudo-historical material, meanwhile, gives rise to questions about the nature of genre, an issue further complicated by the manuscript contexts of these works and one which is coming under increasing critical scrutiny in recent decades.³ My approach deploys a variety of organizing principles, such as genre, manuscript context and regional origin of texts (insular or continental) in order to demonstrate how the critical enterprise involves an engagement with the creative ordering of material. The multiplying possibilities arising from these combinations are an example of the relationship between narrative and place, or more specifically, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'smooth space' (*espace lisse*), an unmarked plane upon which shifting random elements may cross paths, collide and produce new forms.⁴ Narrative may, in itself, function as a similarly productive space, yet it is also always marked off by its formal need for a beginning and an ending. Thus the productivity of narrative is derived not from its formal characteristics, but from its potential for adaptation and appropriation.

The interdependence of critique and creation may be demonstrated in a comparison of the methods of two thinkers dealing with different materials yet employing remarkably similar methods. Brian Stock's study Bernard Silvester's *Cosmographia* (1148), which alternates between verse and prose, as a synthesis of the interpretive process with the act of creating the work to be interpreted, with consequences for my study's view of the storytellers and translators represented in these texts⁵:

³ Sylvia Huot, *From Song to Book: The Poetics of Writing in Old French Lyric and Lyrical Narrative Poetry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), and Keith Busby, *Codex and Context: Reading Old French Verse Narrative in Manuscript*, Faux Titre, 221, 2 vols (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002).

⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 524-37.

⁵ With this in mind, we may also reflect on the medieval tradition of one of the only texts to communicate the thought of Plato, Calcidius's first-century translation and commentary on the *Timaeus*; Paul Dutton suggests that attention to how the *Timaeus* is cited indicates that scholars frequently mistake Calcidius for Plato: 'I have in fact begun to wonder if we should not, when dealing with the medieval reception of the *Timaeus*, create a hyphenated figure whom we would call Calcidius-Plato, putting you will note, the translator and commentator's name first.' Dutton, 'Medieval Approaches to Calcidius', in *Plato's Timaeus as Cultural Icon*, ed. by Gretchen Reydam-Schils (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), pp. 183-205 (p. 194).

While based upon the idea of myth, the commentary turns the notion around and presents instead a demythologization. [...] The two structures, the myth and the demythologization, were accepted as interdependent, resonating parts of a whole. With respect to the *Cosmographia*, the important point is that Bernard incorporated both the idea of a mythical cosmogony and that of a commentary on it.⁶

In this work, the universe results from the interplay of the allegorical figures of Noys, or divine intelligence, and Silva, or dynamic matter, which reflects in turn upon the author's reshaping of his intellectual inheritance.⁷ Bernard's incorporation of myth and its explanation bears comparison with the work of Roland Barthes, whose series of essays previously published separately appeared together under the title *Mythologies* in 1957.⁸ While the pointedly plural title of Barthes' volume is at odds with the totalizing cosmographic vision of Bernard's, we might nevertheless see a parallel between their operations. The essays are individual reflections on how matter is made meaningful, but while Barthes avoids making his readings part of a systematic whole, they are still brought out of the context of their original publication and re-presented to the reader as a collection. This cabinet of discursive curiosities reframes the semiological method exemplified in its contents, as it includes a lengthy explanatory essay on 'le mythe, aujourd'hui'. In the progression from mythologies to demythologization, we may see *Mythologies* as a narrative of readerly compulsion. Barthes's claim that 'la parole mythique est formée d'une matière déjà travaillée en vue d'une communication appropriée' makes clear his view that mythology both encodes culture and bears an imperative to communicate it.⁹ Mythology, like Bernard's notion of the ordered cosmos, emerges at the point of contact between worked matter and the consciousness capable of re-working it.¹⁰ Consideration of issues such as these has stimulated analysis of the interplay of 'scientific' and 'literary' concerns in medieval texts, for as Kellie Robertson reflects; 'As literary critics who look at the representations of things, we should be aware

⁶ Brian Stock, *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century: A Study of Bernard Silvester* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 19-20.

⁷ 'What Bernard has effected, in short, is a metamorphosis of the late classical universe of allegory under the influence of twelfth-century natural philosophy. The dusk of the ancient gods is for him the birthplace of rational science.' (Stock, p. 229).

⁸ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957).

⁹ Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 182.

¹⁰ 'The originality of Bernard's idea of creativity is matched by his conception of matter. Matter is really the unsung heroine of the *Cosmographia*. Unlike Plato, Bernard did not see cosmogony as a story in which gods created by the god mould the body of the world out of the four elements, which are more or less passive, plastic instruments. He saw cosmogony as the working out of the *possibilitas* latent in matter: the imposition of form from without is matched by matter's internal longing for form.' (Stock, pp. 232-33.)

of the fact that medieval writers self-consciously reflected on both the physics and the metaphysics of depicting objects.’¹¹

The ‘aventure novele’ referred to in the thesis title is an apt example of story being simultaneously reified and refracted as it is told through a concrete object. The text from which it is taken, the anonymous fabliau-esque Arthurian tale ‘Du Mantel mautailié’, revolves around an enchanted cloak brought to Arthur’s court by an unnamed young stranger.¹² This narrative is an example of generically playful writing, drawing on Arthurian-Celtic material in its evocation of a fantastically rich court, but also bringing together the fixation upon trials of the virtues of women shared by fabliau, romance, and, in a slightly different form, hagiographic writing. The heterogeneity of manuscripts containing devotional material points towards a relatively fluid conception of genre in the minds of a diverse audience: ‘in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century France, [didactic] literature was in the mainstream and not on the periphery of the cultural enterprise, and collections of vernacular exempla and miracle-tales would have had readers in the laity as well as the monastic and secular clergy. [...] Although medieval readers and audiences would obviously have realized that the tales of *La vie des pères* were not, for example, Breton *lais*, all evidence points to their being enjoyed, in part at least, by the same audiences.’¹³ As well as considering the circulation of texts, the composition of manuscripts also indicates the problematic nature of genre definition. Pamela Gehrke’s term ‘progressional mode’ to describe principle of composition whereby decisions on inclusion are made as the manuscript itself is being produced is particularly useful here: ‘in the process of compilation the extemporaneous choice of each text in a given manuscript suggests not a lack of decision, but a decision based on something other than a static literary system.’¹⁴

With non-hagiographic works like the *Roman d’Eneas* and the *Roman de Brut*, the heterogeneous manuscript evidence indicates readings which undermine assumptions about. Manuscripts containing *Eneas* with other romances of antiquity – notably the

¹¹ Robertson, ‘Medieval Materialism : A Manifesto’, *Exemplaria* 22. 2 (2010), 99-118 (115). See also Bruno Latour, ‘Can We Get Our Materialism Back, Please ?’ *Isis* 98 (2007), 138-42.

¹² ‘Du Mantel mautailié’, in *Recueil général et complet des fabliaux des XIIIe et XIVe siècles*, ed. by Anatole de Montaiglon and Gaston Raynaud, 6 vols (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1872-90), III (1878), pp. 1-29.

¹³ Busby, *Codex and Context*, I, pp. 195-196.

¹⁴ Gehrke, *Saints and Scribes: Medieval Hagiography in Its Manuscript Context*, Modern Philology 126 (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1993), p.9.

Roman de Thèbes and the *Roman de Troie* – hint at their use in forming a vernacular ‘history’ linking the most remarkable empires of the ancient world to a European cultural and political inheritance.¹⁵ The four *Eneas* manuscripts which also include Wace’s *Brut*, might appear to indicate compilers’ and/or patrons’ interest in connecting that inheritance to northern Europe, specifically England; yet all of these were produced on the continent.¹⁶ *Brut* manuscripts such as Lincoln Cathedral Library 104 (Anglo-Norman, thirteenth century), which also contains Gaimar’s *L’Estoire des Engleis* and Jordan Fantosme’s *Chronicle*, may suggest that Wace’s poem ought to be read primarily as a chronicle. This, however, overlooks the inclusion of romance material in other manuscripts, including Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 794 (Continental, second quarter of the thirteenth century), the much studied ‘Guiot’ manuscript, which also includes the *Roman de Troie*, *Athis et Prophilias*, *Les Empereurs de Rome* by Calendre, and the romances of Chrétien de Troyes; in Vatican City, Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana, Pal. Lat. 1971 (Continental, thirteenth century) two sizeable fragments of *Brut* are accompanied by *Partonopeu de Blois*, *Amadas et Ydoine*, and *Floire et Blancheflor*.¹⁷ Equally interesting for a reading of how the lives of saints can be read along with – or into – other texts is Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 1416 (Continental, dated 1292), which inserts the Barking *Vie de saint Edouard le confesseur* into the episode on Chadwalader. The codicological evidence for viewing the texts studied in this thesis as belonging to distinct genres is, as critics are continuing to demonstrate, inconclusive.

The manuscript context of ‘Du Mantel mautaillié’ is particularly revealing in this regard; its preservation in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 837 (Île de France, late thirteenth century), a large anthology of miscellaneous material, brings it into contact with a wide variety of comic and religious texts. These include Rutebeuf’s *Vie de sainte Marie l’Egyptienne*, a version of a legend discussed in this thesis, which, like the more obviously secular ‘Du Mantel mautaillié’, combines prurience and moralizing in a narrative where

¹⁵ London, British Museum, Add. 34114 (Insular, last third of the fourteenth century); Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 60 (late fourteenth century); Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 784 (late thirteenth or early fourteenth century).

¹⁶ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 12603 (Continental, fourteenth century); Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 1416 (Continental, thirteenth century); Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 1450 (Continental, thirteenth century); Montpellier, Bibliothèque de l’École de médecine, 251 (Continental, mid-thirteenth century).

¹⁷ Busby, *Codex and Context*, I, p. 134. See also Busby, ‘Narrative Genres’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, ed. by Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 139-52.

the establishment of truth is dependent upon the clothing of the female body.¹⁸ By opening this thesis with a reference to this tale and its ambiguous object, which simultaneously covers the bodies and reveals the secrets of its wearers, I mean to draw attention to the work's place at the troublesome intersection between genres. 'Du Mantel mautaillié' reflects on the tension between revelation and concealment inherent to narrative acts, a concern which underpins much of my analysis of the other texts in this study.¹⁹

A scandalous antitype of Cinderella's slipper, the titular cloak will always be either too long or too short on any woman who has been unfaithful to her lord, and may only be possessed by a woman who is faithful, whom it will fit perfectly. The women of the court are called out one by one to try it on, and all are publicly shown to have been unfaithful. The quest for the young woman addressed in the title is precipitated by the youth's comment that Arthur's court, which had been held in high esteem, will be shamed if they cannot find a single honest woman in it. One woman is duly found in a secluded chamber, and it is to her that Girflet speaks of 'une aventure novele'. The cloak is a physical symbol of interruption into the closed world of the court, where all gifts of clothing had previously come from the king and queen and had served to affirm the social cohesion of their group. The singularity of this remarkable object contrasts with the multiple and previously undisclosed stories 'revealed' by it. The desire to take possession of the cloak entails something of Bachelard's image of the *coffret*, a special type of object insofar as 'il s'ouvre'. The reflexive verb implies a coincidence between some kind of agency inherent in matter and the potential for imaginative 'filling' of the space contained within the closed box which disappears the moment it is opened: 'il y aura toujours plus de choses dans un coffret fermé que dans un coffret ouvert' ('there will always be more things in a closed, than in an open, box').²⁰ Likewise, the greatest threat of this interruption of the closed/disclosing cloak into the court is that it literally leaves nothing to the imagination.

¹⁸ Busby, *Codex and Context*, I, 439-43.

¹⁹ On the relationship between the comic 'Mantel mautaillié' and its tragic counterpart *La Chastelaine de Vergi*, a version of which is to be found in this same manuscript, see James Simpson, 'Humour and the Obscene', in *The Cambridge History of French Literature*, ed. by William Burgwinkle, Nicholas Hammond, and Emma Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 111-20 (pp. 119-20).

²⁰ Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, p. 90.

Girflet's naming this interruption 'aventure' exploits the term's slipperiness, hinting at the quests of romance but also insinuating a sinister uncertainty – an uncertainty made all the more troubling given how much the court has staked on this previously unseen lady. It becomes an all-too-physical example of the truth-telling value of the literary technique of the *integumentum*, praised by Geoffrey of Vinsauf: 'When due order has arranged the material in the hidden chamber of the mind, let poetic art come forward to clothe the matter with words.'²¹ For this reason, it is essential for them to put a stop to the cloak's circulation and keep their scandal within 'cele sale'; when the lady tries it on and it fits perfectly, the youth concedes that she must keep it, but adds:

'Je l'ai par maintes cors porté,
Et plus de .m. l'ont afublé.
Onques mès ne vi en ma vie
Sanz mesfet ne sans vilonie
Nule fors vous tant seulement.' (ll. 853-57)

'I have taken it around many courts, and more than a thousand have tried it on. In all my life, I never saw anyone without any guilt or baseness apart from you.'

This brings the 'aventure' to an end, but the youth's revelation of his previous travels brings another twist to the tale. If it has taken him this long to find a trustworthy woman, we can only wonder at all the previous public humiliations, more or less similar to those at Arthur's court, for which the cloak has been responsible; though the mechanism of revelation is the same in each case, the stories which emerge are unique to its participants. Furthermore, this story may end with an end to stories, but what the termination to the cloak's journeys implies is that all women outside this court are free to cheat as much as they like, since the object which would have forced their secrets into the public domain is no longer in circulation. This goes beyond R. Howard Bloch's reading of the narrative, which asserts that tale-telling is equivalent to this garment.²² Narrative prompted by the presence of the cloak can assume the position of both the 'aventure' and the 'sale'; it is generated within the court but, with the proliferation of writing on the Arthurian court and on the themes and concerns emerging from this tale, it also has a life

²¹ Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria nova*, trans. Margaret F. Nims (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1967), chapter 1, ll. 60-61.

²² 'There is no means of separating the narrative economy of the fabliau from the economy of clothing. One right fit and the tale is too short; too many wrong fits and it never ends.' Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fabliaux* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 23.

outside the court, which may serve to praise or to damn it. Arthur's declared desire at the beginning of the poem for 'aucune aventure novele' is fulfilled, but in such a way as to permanently change the privileged space of his court and threaten to change its – and his – relationship to the outside world; the beautiful object, once worn, effaces the boundary between public and private in a similar manner to the functioning of Bachelard's *coffret*. The cloak resembles a text, as, in Cary Howie's words, 'once inside a book, any book, it's impossible to emerge from it absolutely intact, to be outside it in quite the same way as before.'²³

This thesis explores a form of reading which attempts to combine the critical attitudes of immersion and distance. My aim is, in part, comparable with Gayle Margherita's interrogation of the question of origins across a range of genres, in which she argues that 'history as an epistemological category is inseparable from the problematics of representation, or, more specifically, from fantasy.'²⁴ While Margherita's readings of her heterogeneous selection of texts are predominantly informed by feminist and psychoanalytic theory, however, my studies lean further towards the term proposed by Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, 'surface reading'.²⁵ The approach I have taken to the sources studied in this thesis is based upon interrogation of the understanding of place in texts by locating things from a supposed 'horizon of experience', such as that of twelfth- and thirteenth-century writing in French, within a new relational place which puts them out of the order established for them by previous schools of thought and practices of composition; unlike historicist reconstruction of the medieval context in which these works were produced, the purpose of this is to demonstrate how our own creative and critical faculties can be mutually illuminating in probing the questions raised by these texts.

²³ Cary Howie, *Claustrophilia: The Erotics of Enclosure in Medieval Literature*. The New Middle Ages (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) p. 1.

²⁴ Gayle Margherita, *The Romance of Origins: Language and Sexual Difference in Middle English Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), p. 3. On how this may be connected with works from the period of this study see, for example, Zrinka Stahuljak on the narrative work of historical legitimization in the *Roman d'Eneas* and the *Roman de Troie*: 'These romances propose a version of history that is itself "unnatural," violent and teeming with reversals, disruptions, and hindrances of straightforward progress. [...] They tell the implicit story of Henry II's ascension to the throne and at the same time they legitimize it. Indeed, this ambiguity seems to be the privilege of literature, for these texts both participate in and question, validate and undermine, the historiographic model of genealogy.' Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages: Translatio, Kinship, and Metaphor* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), p. 12.

²⁵ Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, 'Surface Reading: An Introduction', *Representations*, 108. 1 (2009), 1-21.

My study aims to bring into dialogue the various ‘containments’ practiced by authors and, to a lesser extent, manuscript compilers. While my study does acknowledge the potential for manuscript context to shape our view of reading communities – indeed, its organization is derived from a speculative reimagining of the creative process of compilation – I do not treat this issue in substantial detail. This is, nevertheless, a potential future direction for research building on the questions addressed in this study. Zoë Sofia’s term ‘container technologies’ offers a positive image of space and matter, rejecting views of them as passive and inert in a manner comparable to Bernard Silvester’s elevation of matter as being alive with potential.²⁶ Sofia’s discussion of the Heideggerian notion of the vessel as characterized by its holding function bears a similarity to Sarah Kay’s depiction of the didactic impulse to monologism, as both are marked by the active or dynamic potential of an entity or method which appears inert.²⁷ The arguably counterintuitive arrangement of these texts is designed to illustrate something of the various forms of interpretation of saints’ lives emerging in Pamela Gehrke’s study of manuscripts containing combinations of devotional and secular material.²⁸ While Gehrke’s work studies hagiography in a more regular context, my work looks to create a new contextual space perhaps analogous to Deleuze and Guattari’s term *haecceity*; within it, works from apparently diverging genres are put in dialogue with one another, and axiomatic national myths are realigned as frames to works looking to places beyond the tangible.²⁹

In the arrangement of this selection of texts I seek to establish a mode of reading in which the understanding of place is progressively destabilized. This trajectory, moving from the establishment of a continental imperial centre to the repeatedly gained and lost island on

²⁶ Zoë Sofia, ‘Container Technologies’ *Hypatia* 15, 2 (2000), 181-201. This is particularly pertinent to work in medieval studies which has sought to highlight the significance of corporeality and physical experience in the cultural production of the period; see, for example the work of Caroline Walker Bynum, and also Bruce W. Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture*, *Figurae* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

²⁷ Sarah Kay, *The Place of Thought: The Complexity of One in Late Medieval French Didactic Poetry*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

²⁸ Pamela Gehrke, *Saints and Scribes*.

²⁹ Haecceity, a term Deleuze and Guattari adapt from Duns Scotus, refers to the contingent and composite individuality of any and every encounter at any given time: ‘It should not be thought that a haecceity consists simply of a décor or backdrop that situates subjects, or of appendages that hold things and people to the ground. It is the entire assemblage in its individuated aggregate that is a haecceity; it is this assemblage that is defined by a longitude and a latitude, by speeds and affects, independently of forms and subjects, which belong to another plane.’ (*A Thousand Plateaus*, p.289). In the terms of the title of this thesis, haecceity may be analogous with ‘aventure’.

the fringe of Europe, interrupts the transfer of interests from one secular place to another by examining the definitions of place and story in texts ostensibly more concerned with heaven than with earth, or, in the terms of this study, with space rather than place. The didactic drive of the material dealing with saints encourages reflection upon the hereafter as a guide to ensuring the virtuous conduct of their audience while still alive, yet they also convey a concern with many of the same secular issues of the proto-romance *Roman d'Eneas* and the pseudo-historical *Roman de Brut*. My readings move outwards from the rhetorically defined space of the imperial 'herité' through empires and regimes in flux and ending on the multiply occupied island off the edge of the continent, with the aim of drawing together perspectives on what lies within enclosures and what lies beyond them. These 'enclosures' are as much narrative spaces as topographic or architectural. Consideration of place and boundaries, a major concern in postcolonial theory, is at the heart of Sharon Kinoshita's study of how Old French literature represents encounters with the African, Middle Eastern or Celtic other.³⁰ Kinoshita presents an alternative to the focus of critics like Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Suzanne Conklin Akbari, who predominantly apply postcolonial approaches to medieval texts from a specific time and place (thirteenth-century England); her readings highlight unexpected continuities and reversals as well as conflicts and disjunctions. Place is also brought into the foreground as an important element in Kay's work on fourteenth-century didactic poetry. Kay's interpretation of such texts as the *Ovide moralisé* illuminates the importance of spatial metaphors in the construction of an edifying message, and the link she explores between the philosophical or poetic subject and his or her place in space informs my reading of works from an earlier period. The turn towards explorations of univocality also informs Cary Howie's approach to representations of enclosure and constriction in medieval and early modern literature. The sequence of Howie's readings, which moves through various forms of enclosure and ends in the closet – in his interpretation an undervalued locus of pleasure – is a movement similar in concern but opposite in direction to my own selection of texts.³¹

In order to define how I use the term *place* in this study, it will be necessary to distinguish it from *space*. Place is, as Edward Casey has suggested, an under-explored notion in post-

³⁰ Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006)

³¹ Howie, *Claustrophilia*, p.4.

Enlightenment intellectual discourse; this may be accounted for by the opposition between place (connoting locality and specificity) and space (connoting universality, and thus a notion more conducive to positivist analysis). Nevertheless, place has made something of a return in the work of scholars in a range of fields.³² Gaston Bachelard's 1958 study of the relationship between lyric poetry and interior space suggests the potential for re-construing place and consciousness; this has also informed my concerns for the study of narrative works, as I have attempted to demonstrate how inhabitation, a process unfolding in both time and place, and its by-products can be represented in narrative form. In Henri Lefebvre's Marxist analysis of public space, one of the fundamental tasks of revolution is an opening up of space which is conceived of in a manner that nullifies the tacit regulations and controls of the 'espace abstrait' (abstract space) of capitalism.³³ His attribution of abstraction to this type of spatial organization implies that the new space created by revolutionary rupture with the status quo – termed 'espace différentiel' (differential space) – must be locally determined and non-hierarchical, as social and private actions establish what we might also term a sense of place within it.³⁴ In a more literary but no less political vein, Kristin Ross's study of Rimbaud's poetry in the context of evolving notions of space in the period of the Paris Commune also draws attention to the resistance of order imposed by the state.³⁵ Ross underlines the significance of the newly scientific discourse of geography in this period which sees both advance of and challenge to French colonial projects, and we may see an echo of the reconfiguration of space through the destruction of idols, as witnessed in many martyr lives, in the Communards' demolition of the Vendôme column.³⁶ The complementary endeavours of scientific geography and colonial expansion reduce space to commodity, and disregards human presence in any respect other than economic output.³⁷

Lefebvre's concerns are echoed in the work of Michel de Certeau, who analyses practices of 'le quotidien' which open out spaces for resistance to the strategies of the various

³² For a survey of contemporary positions on this subject, see Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 285-330.

³³ Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*, 4th edn., Librairie de l'architecture et de la ville (Paris: Anthropos, 2000), pp. 60-65.

³⁴ Lefebvre, p. 64.

³⁵ Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune*, Radical Thinkers 31 (London and New York: Verso, 2008).

³⁶ Ross, p. 5-8.

³⁷ Ross, pp. 90-97.

authorities who direct the structures within which they live, work, play and worship. The basis of the second volume of *L'invention du quotidien* is observation of and interviews with the inhabitants of the working-class Croix-Rousse district of Lyon.³⁸ His anchoring of his theoretical points in observational fieldwork underlines his attention to place and locality, and especially to the ways in which people adapt and subvert Lefebvrian 'espace abstrait' to fashion lived place. This concern with powers of adaptation to local circumstances is also evident in Certeau's study of history and historiography, in which he cites hagiography – especially uncritical hagiography, which he identifies as 'la plus importante' – as evidence for communal identity whose textual iterations 'représente la conscience qu'il a de lui-même en associant une *figure* à un *lieu*':

Le texte implique [...] un réseau de supports (transmission orale, manuscrite ou imprimée) dont il arrête, à un moment donné, le développement indéfini. Dans la dynamique de la prolifération et de la dissémination sociales, il fixe une étape. Aux fuits et à la «perte» dont se paie la diffusion, il répond par la clôture d'une mise en scène, qui circonscrit ou rectifie le mouvement des convictions en marche [...] À cet égard, il a une double fonction de découpage. Il *distingue* un temps et un lieu de groupe.³⁹

The text [...] implies a network of supports (oral transmission, manuscripts or printed works) whose infinite development it stops at a given moment. In the dynamics of social dissemination and proliferation, the text establishes a stopping point. It responds to leaks and "loss" – the price of any diffusion – with the closure of a theatrical scene that circumscribes or rectifies the movement of growing conviction [...] In this respect the Saint's Life bears a doubly separative function. It distinguishes both the time and place of a group. (trans. by Tom Conley, p. 272)

The 'double function de découpage' Certeau identifies in hagiography, reminiscent of Lefebvre's 'espace différentiel', makes place and its definitions as productive and provocative a notion for cultural studies as it is for political praxis.

From my perspective also, martyr and ascetic lives offer a complex presentation of places and spaces. To see this, we must briefly imagine a distinction between the narratives of saints' lives and the material existence of their cults. Miracles described in hagiography invert the relationship between space (featureless, unknown) and place (immediate, sensible); the incomprehensibility of events marks the site of the miracle as site for both

³⁸ Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol, *L'invention du quotidien 2. Habiter, cuisiner*, Collection Folio Essais 238 (Paris : Gallimard, 1994).

³⁹ Certeau, *L'écriture de l'histoire*, Collection Folio Histoire 115 (Gallimard: Paris, 1975), p. 320.

contestation and devotion, lending it the qualities of space rather than place. The miracle invokes a necessary distance between the divine and the mortal, even as the saint acts as a bridge between the two, recalling Casey's comments on the horizon as a point of simultaneous contact and division of landscape: 'As a boundary, the horizon does not merely close off the landscape; it opens it up for further exploration, that is, for bodily ingress and exploration'.⁴⁰ Yet cults of saints depend on there being a place for a shrine, a relic, a further miraculous encounter. This does not necessarily have to be the same place where the original miracle occurred – the removal of the body of St Catherine from the scene of her martyrdom to Mount Sinai is a case in point – but this idea of a material object or tangible place being effective in making contact with the divine makes the space created by the miracle all the more awe-inspiringly remarkable. How does this compare with the relationship between place and space in narratives of secular figures, like Eneas, Brutus or Arthur? In each of these cases, space is transformed into place through the narrative presentation of history – before a story is told, it can go anywhere, as the narrator's comments on Eneas's editing of the story of the fall of Troy suggest, but once it is told it becomes like the deformed cloak of 'Du Mantel mautaillié' or the opened box; it has become part of the realm of knowledge, and is incorporated into the sphere of common knowledge, literally 'taking its place' on the horizon of cultural experiences and expectations.

In paying close attention to the sequencing of my selected texts I hope to have demonstrated how the representation of place in and through narrative is a source of both difference and continuity between them. While I begin with a poem whose subject matter is drawn from a long-lived and complex literary tradition, where the focal point is the return to the land held by the ancestors and promised to the Trojans by the gods, I end with one based upon texts only a few decades old, yet which conceives of the land it describes as a site of loss which can never be held by any one group in perpetuity. This problematization of possession functions ambiguously in the context of the *Roman de Brut's* composition as it simultaneously endorses and undermines expansionist projects such as the Normans' conquest of England, an issue addressed by Michelle Warren, who argues that 'Arthurian histories perform periodic boundary maintenance for regionalist

⁴⁰ Edward S. Casey, 'Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does It Mean to Be in the Place-World?', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 91. 4 (2001), 683-93 (p. 690).

concepts.⁴¹ The question of how cities, realms and kingdoms may be defined varies between these texts, but it is rarely straightforward, and the narratives which describe and contain these types of place make clear their conceptual frailties. The lives of the martyrs Christina of Tyre and Catherine of Alexandria allude to an imperial superstructure within which deviant spaces are opened up, but these spaces and their shifting edges are distinct in character, revealing the relationships between saintly and secular authorities. While the victory of Christianity over its rivals in the first of these is figured as a rippling-outward from Christina's improvised chapel – the initial deviant space – across the still-pagan empire, in the second, the empire is emphatically Christian, and the rebel territory within it contains a saint who is allied through shared faith with the emperor, and who calls on him to complete the destruction of the pagan renegade occupying her city. A similar attention to the tensions between saints and the urban milieu is apparent in the lives of Alexis and Mary of Egypt, both of which make much of the ways in which saintly bodies are either reincorporated into existing ecclesiastical and social structures or are permanently exiled from them. The *Voyage de saint Brendan*, meanwhile, constructs an exotic, fantastical series of tests in which islands represent placiality and embodied existence in a borderland between mortality and immortality. In the course of this journey, the tests of faith and its subsequent rewards are translated into an instructive narrative shared by the abbot's community and the wider public, as an adventure story extends the blessings of the cloister beyond its walls. My approach refers to the topographical study of place in medieval literature and culture exemplified by Paul Zumthor and continued more recently by Molly Robinson Kelly and Christiania Whitehead, but is also influenced by Mary Carruthers' work on memory and architectural metaphor; however, I adapt the discussion of place to refer to the related domain of narrative and narrative-making.⁴² Narrative structures themselves may imply a mnemonic function motivating their composition, particularly in didactic allegorical works, but in the texts under consideration here they can also be read against a wider diegetic context, one in which the 'why' as well as the 'what' of storytelling comes under

⁴¹ Michelle Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain*, Medieval Cultures, 22 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 247.

⁴² Paul Zumthor, *La Mesure du monde: representation de l'espace au moyen âge*, Collection Poétique (Paris: Seuil, 1993); Molly Robinson Kelly, *The Hero's Place: Medieval Literary Traditions of Space and Belonging* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009); Christiania Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind: A Study of Medieval Architectural Allegory*, Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2003). Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

scrutiny. Like Heidegger's jug, as discussed by Sofia, story is similarly a mechanism for both containment and expression. A similar approach is adopted by Catherine Léglu in her analysis of lyric and narrative poetry, in which she critiques Giorgio Agamben's characterization of the chamber as analogous with the lyric stanza; where Agamben sees the 'cambra' as a space for self-creation through language, Léglu looks beyond its walls to how language constitutes the chamber itself, and demonstrates how narrative writing in particular constructs the chamber as both site of remembrance (in line with the image's mnemonic potential described by Carruthers and Whitehead) and indefinable illusion of wholeness.⁴³

The images with which this study is concerned are a special category of worked matter at the intersection between the physical world and the perception of the artist, and the heroic status of matter, as Stock sees it in the *Cosmographia*, is again asserted in the close literary analysis of the texts in this study. Long considered of relatively marginal interest to students of literature, hagiography is currently enjoying increased attention. I have deliberately chosen saints' lives which have either been previously studied as literature or, in the case of the *Vie de sainte Christine*, are the work of a widely studied author, as these are apt examples of how hagiography reacts productively with other genres during the period in question. More speculatively, with the closer scholarly attention to lives of saints it may in turn co-constitute the horizon of experience of more and more current students of medieval writing. The thresholds between these texts and those that frame them, in terms of period, language and genre, are not as definitive as they appear, recalling Casey's comment that 'every horizon at once conjoins and separates'.⁴⁴ Hagiography is, as Simon Gaunt suggests, a crucial confluence of a variety of cultural currents: 'Individual writers working within a generic framework grounded in traditional legends can have an influence on the way their particular version of the story evolves, so that each new version represents a new, "individual" reading of it.'⁴⁵ For example, by reading the *Voyage de saint Brendan* alongside the *Vie de saint Alexis* (a combination also witnessed in one of the surviving manuscripts) we see how a text replete with monsters, marvels and adventures at sea in fact shares much of the same concern with how

⁴³ Catherine Léglu, 'Cambra: Desire and Place in Troubadour Poetry and Medieval Catalan Narrative', *Exemplaria* 22. 4 (2010), 285-304.

⁴⁴ Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998), p. 26.

⁴⁵ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*, Cambridge Studies in French, 35 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 182.

narratives are created and reported with the life of the urban hermit, whose testimonial letter establishes his long-concealed sainthood.⁴⁶ The performative, and particularly rhetorical, dimensions of imperial identity emerge as key issues in a comparison of the *Roman d'Eneas*, an adaptation of the Western European literary canon's quintessential celebration of empire, and the *Vie de sainte Christine*, the life of a Christian martyr pitched against the forces of Rome, and whose aristocratic polytheist father describes himself as 'celui qui ta vie a escrite en sa main' (l. 1797).⁴⁷ The chronological continuity between the *Roman d'Eneas* and the *Roman de Brut* is interrupted in order to highlight the ambivalences and disavowed poly-vocality within the imperial projects they describe. Exile and survival in zones beyond the opposite ends of the 'mare nostrum' come to the fore in reading the *Vie de sainte Marie l'Egyptienne* against the *Roman de Brut*, which see the uncharted spaces of the desert and the island respectively as problematized by the afterlives of their inhabitants. A comparison of the emperor figures in the *Vie de sainte Christine* and the *Vie de sainte Catherine* illuminates the different contexts within which martyrdom occurs, and the poems pose questions about the carrying over of pre-Christian knowledge and artefacts into a Christian setting and the problematic underside to *translatio studii* and *translatio imperii*.

It is my intention to demonstrate how close attention to the relationships between places and stories, and to how people move in and out of them, can illuminate connections and give a sense of the community of disparate texts and their readers, medieval and modern alike. As useful as Jauss's notion of the 'horizon of expectation' is, the model of readerly experience I propose entails the complex relief of the landscape bounded by the horizon, and seeks out the intrusions of unassimilable space within that landscape-place as well as reflecting on the more obviously alien space which lies beyond it. My approach to the topography of story owes more to Casey's description of 'the horizon [which] does not merely close off the landscape; it opens it up for further exploration, that is, for bodily ingress and exploration'.⁴⁸ The attention to the surface texture of these poems recalls the notion of the page as a meeting-point, described thus by Catherine Brown in her meditation upon reading and the encounter with text: 'readers and the objects they read

⁴⁶ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, nouv. acq. fr. 4503 (Insular, around 1200).

⁴⁷ On the particularly gendered reception of the *Aeneid* from the Roman period to the modern, see Marilyn Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval Aeneid*, Medieval Cultures (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

⁴⁸ Casey, 'Between Geography and Philosophy', p. 690.

are, as long as reading happens, coterporal and cospatial.’⁴⁹ Like Brown, I believe that ‘what matters for me, when I think about this coeval encounter, is not the search for some unmediated “authenticity”; rather, it’s the conscious embrace of mediation, of the dynamics of relation and exchange.’⁵⁰ It is to an extension of this textual and/or material mediation to the mediating work of narrative that I now turn.

⁴⁹ Catherine Brown, ‘In the Middle’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 30. 3 (2000), 547-74 (p.554).

⁵⁰ Brown, ‘In the Middle’, p. 554.

Chapter 1

Where do we begin? Origins, identity and storytelling in the *Roman d'Eneas*

The integument is a type of exposition which wraps the apprehension of truth in a fictional narrative, and thus it is also called an *involucrum*, a cover. One grasps the utility of this work, which is self knowledge; it is very useful for man to know himself, as Macrobius says: "From the sky comes *nothis elitos*," that is, know yourself.¹

The concern with the correct interpretation of Virgil's text as a form of clothing for a transcendent truth is representative of the efforts of Christian authors and teachers to reclaim pagan poetry for a post-pagan age. This is not new in the twelfth century; Augustine's meditations upon his own readerly pleasures are among the most striking aspects of his *Confessions*, and while the *Aeneid* may be a less troublesome text for medieval Christian interpreters than, for example, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, its all-too-human pantheon still requires careful treatment. The twelfth-century 'truths' about kingship and power wrapped in this centuries-old fiction do not necessarily need this cover to make their operations comprehensible, but makes them more palatable. Drawing the correct message is translated from a pedagogic concern in Bernard's reading of the *Aeneid* into a thematic one in the Anglo-Norman *Roman d'Eneas* (c.1160), and even more than this, attention shifts from the act of reading to the relationship between storyteller and audience. By the same token, in any consideration of the audience for this particular poem we ought to take note of how it is placed within its surviving manuscripts. The *Roman d'Eneas* is preserved in nine manuscripts, seven of which position it as part of a larger historical narrative by grouping it with texts whose action predates the Aeneas story (the *Roman de Thebes* and the *Roman de Troie*) and/or the *Roman de Brut*, which continues the history of the Trojans and their descendants following Aeneas. The relationship between the *Eneas* and the *Brut* (a sequence observed in four of the manuscripts) is of particular interest for this study, as the chronology of narratives ostensibly involves a shift of genre, from proto-romance to pseudo-history.² In reading

¹ *Commentary on the First Six Books of Virgil's Aeneid attributed to Bernard Silvestris*, trans. and ed. by Earl G. Schreiber and Thomas E. Maresca (Lincoln, Nebraska, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 5.

² On the frequent inclusion of the *Roman de Troie* as the opening text in its manuscripts (including those which do not contain the *Eneas*), Keith Busby argues that 'its general function is to anchor all texts which

these texts as part of a more varied ensemble, however, this textual chronology is de-emphasized, and in no other text studied in this thesis is the simultaneously cohesive and divisive nature of narrative-making more apparent than in this reinterpretation of a (perhaps *the*) imperial Roman narrative. The *Roman d'Eneas* presents the narrative of the flight of the surviving Trojans from the siege of Troy; led by Eneas, son of Anchises and Venus, they sail westwards, halting at the spectacular court of Dido at Carthage. They spend the winter there, during which time Eneas embarks on an affair with Dido, but he is urged by Venus to go to the lands in Italy originally held by Dardanus, the founder of Troy. Dido is devastated, and commits suicide when Eneas leaves. Once in Italy Eneas enters the underworld and meets his father, who, unlike Virgil's Anchises, is already dead at the beginning of the narrative. Anchises shows Eneas the line of heirs who will rule the whole of Italy, and when Eneas returns to his companions they set up their fort in the lands of king Latinus. They are challenged by Turnus, who had been promised these lands and Latinus's daughter Lavine in marriage, but Eneas wins the support of Evander and his son, the newly knighted Pallas, and wages war against Latinus's forces. After a bloody battle which claims the lives of Pallas and the queen of the Voscians, Camille, who had been fighting on Turnus's side, Latinus decrees that Turnus and Eneas will meet in single combat to determine the succession. As they prepare for the duel the Trojans set up camp in front of Latinus's city of Pallantee, and Eneas and Lavine begin a secret courtship, much to the dismay of Lavine's mother. On the day of the duel Eneas states his divinely sanctioned claim to the lands of his ancestor, and he triumphs over Turnus, killing him in revenge for his killing of Pallas. Eneas and Lavine then continue their courtship for two more weeks before being married, and are confirmed by the poet as the founders of the line which will rule all of the 'latine tere'.

Noting that the *Eneas* poet both edits his source and depicts his protagonist engaging in the same activity in his account of his experiences, we can see an author who is studiously engaged with the processes of consuming and producing text. More than a warrior, Eneas is a storyteller, and his establishment of a new city is achieved through his use of words as much as through his actions, the actions of others or the workings of fate.³

follow in a cultural tradition which begins with the Greeks [...] *Le Roman de Troie* [represents] the easternmost part of the *terra cognita* of the manuscript.' Busby, *Codex and Context*, p. 415.

³ This depiction of Eneas's strengths recalls the image of Virgil's hero as discussed by Gayle Margherita, who echoes Jean-Charles Huchet's psychoanalytic reading of the French text by focusing on the exclusion of the

Eneas's presentation of himself and his cause, his consistency and awareness of his audience makes him a persuasive master of narrative, yet his mastery is still subject to contestation. Selected episodes which revolve around material objects illustrate the necessarily perpetual nature of Eneas's task of historical fabrication, through which he must act to define his origins and subdue elements which undermine his quest for legitimate lordship. Objects such as Hector's gonfalon and the Trojan gold coins Tarchon pretends to offer to Camille form a material counter-narrative to Eneas's story, while the account of the lengthy preparations for Camille's funeral disturbs the apparently neat, 'happy-ever-after' temporal frame of the poem. Finally, I read the affirmations and contestations of the Trojan narrative of the mission for a homeland against the Carthage episode. This disquieting place of shelter is a mid-point in Eneas's journey from east to west, and the city's status as a mid-point in the wider narrative of *translatio imperii* imbues it with both stability and insecurity. This reading aims to interrogate the individuating and nationalizing discourse of the poem, while allowing space for the troublesome and contradictory elements around its edges which threaten the protagonist's desire for territorial integrity.

1. Trojan self-fashioning

In the introduction to his study of selfhood in early modern English literature, Stephen Greenblatt introduces the notion of self-creation through language as an act which entails both assertion and submission: 'we may say that self-fashioning occurs at the point of encounter between an authority and an alien, that what is produced in this encounter partakes of both the authority and the alien that is marked for attack, and hence that any achieved identity always contains within itself the signs of its own subversion or loss.'⁴ He claims, however, that the 'manipulable, artful process' of deliberate self-creation is evident in the writing of the classical and early modern periods but dormant in the Middle Ages. Countering this presumption of a medieval monologism at odds with the dialogism of the periods which precede and follow it, Sarah Kay argues that this distinction,

feminine in order to assert an authoritatively masculine narrative of power and succession. Margherita, *The Romance of Origins*, pp. 129-51.

⁴ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 9.

exemplified in the apparent shift between epic's concern with community and romance's concern with the individual, is far from clear.⁵ In my view, this 'manipulable, artful process' may in fact be observed in texts like the *Roman d'Eneas*, primarily in the stories Eneas tells about himself and his people in their encounters with others on their journey from Troy to Italy.

Perhaps the most prominent – and certainly the most extended – example of Trojan self-fashioning in the poem is Eneas' recounting of the sack of Troy at the request of Dido and her lords. Prior to his retelling of this story, whose outlines are already known to the Carthaginians, the narrator offers a preliminary précis of events in reported speech, so effectively Eneas' speech happens twice for the reader of the medieval text. Since this narrative is to be told repeatedly in a more or less condensed form in the course of the poem, this short summary does not appear particularly remarkable, but I believe that its placement in relation to the more detailed account raises important questions about how the complicated history of the Trojans may be understood. In Virgil's poem, the preamble to the story of Troy is expressed in the form of specific questions asked by Dido about Hector, Achilles and the horse, and she eventually asks Aeneas to tell them 'from the first beginning the treachery of the Greeks, the sad fate of your people, and your own wanderings' (1. 753-55: "immo age et a prima dic, hospes, origine nobis / insidias" inquit "Danaum casusque tuorum / erroresque tuos").⁶ The placing of this request at the very end of the book means that there is a pronounced formal break between the request and its fulfilment, which takes up the whole of the next two books. In the continuous verse of the *Roman d'Eneas*, the account of the war is less clearly separated from the preceding material, and although the French text's version of events is substantially faithful to its source, its representation of the Trojan storyteller is more ambiguous. In the middle of the summary of Eneas' speech, the narrator observes:

Il afaita un poy son compte
que l'en ne li tornast a honte,
qu'en ne deist qu'il s'emblast,

⁵ Sarah Kay, *The Chansons de geste in the Age of Romance: Political Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995). See also R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), and Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*.

⁶ All quotations from the *Aeneid* are taken from the Loeb Classical Library edition, trans. by H. Rushton Fairclough, revised by G. P. Goold, 2 vols (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1999-2000).

par couardisse s'en alast. (ll. 930-33)⁷

He altered his tale a little so that nothing in it should bring shame on him, and so no-one could accuse him of fleeing out of cowardice.

This comment on his careful editing of events is perhaps nothing more than an example of the *Eneas* poet's tendency to 'flatten out' the allusiveness and ambiguity of the Latin poem, a tendency noted by Lee Patterson in his comparison of the texts.⁸ However, the *Eneas* poet's comment on editorial practice goes further than Virgil's protagonist's immediate launch into his tale at the request of his hosts. The placement of this comment in the middle of Eneas's reported account introduces a note of spatial indeterminacy that reflects upon the very position from which he speaks; it is both part of the narrative and prefatory to it, in the same way that the city where he finds shelter is simultaneously peripheral and central to the wider narrative. It could then be argued that the *Eneas* is a text which obliquely discloses the subjective nature of national history in the precise moment of its repetition, as its narrator draws attention to the exclusionary decisions involved in its practice.⁹ This echoes the efforts of 'suppression' identified by Patterson, as here they become embodied in the actions of the protagonist as well as in those of the poet. Eneas claims to speak authoritatively on the events in question – 'la verité vous conteray / car je y fuz, sel vi et say' (ll. 952-3: 'I will tell you the truth, for I was there, so I saw and know it all') – but this declaration of fidelity is undermined by the forewarning of his strategic economies with the truth. It is possible that this is merely an explanatory note inserted by the *Eneas* poet for the benefit of a readership unaware of less flattering views of Aeneas contained in other texts like the *Roman de Troie*, where his verbal facility is placed in the context of betrayal and self-interest (ll. 5463-64: 'Moult saveit bien autre araisnier / E son prou querre et porchassier.'). Yet this hint at his dishonesty appears incongruous in a text which seems generally positive in its representation of its protagonist. In placing this comment between the paraphrased summary of Eneas' tale and its comprehensive re-narration, the poet disturbs the relationship between author and subject; unlike the episode in the underworld where the

⁷ All quotations are taken from *Le Roman d'Eneas*, ed. by Aimé Petit, Lettres Gothiques (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1997); English translations are my own.

⁸ '[The] process of diminishing and so suppressing an apparently too-powerful past is the central strategy that governs the whole of the *Eneas*, both in the story it tells and in its way of telling.' Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p. 171.

⁹ Noah D. Guynn, 'Historicizing Shame, Shaming History: Origination and Negativity in the *Eneas*', *L'Esprit Créateur* 39. 4 (1999), 112-25.

sight of his dead companions forces him to turn away in shame, there is no-one in Dido's palace who knows more about what happened at Troy than he does.¹⁰ Without exposing the elided details of Trojan history, the *Eneas* poet insinuates a critique of the historian-storyteller's claim to authority through the prelude to Eneas' performance of his expurgated narrative. Yet the poet himself appears to be absent from the action, and his drawing attention to Eneas's liberties with his personal history is a means for the poet to divert attention from the liberty he takes with his own multiple sources.¹¹

Huchet's comments on the *Eneas* in light of trends in medieval literary theory, notably in Geoffrey of Vinsauf's distinction between *ordo naturalis* and *ordo artificialis*, suggest a more 'naturalistic' or 'mimetic' narrative chronology in the French text than its Latin source, which begins *in medias res*.¹² As Huchet suggests, the opening of the *Eneas* is not strictly an example of *ordo naturalis*, as its reference to the Judgment of Paris as the cause of the Trojan War is inserted into the account of the flight from Troy. However, the account of Eneas' narration at Carthage of this same episode in the wider (but still carefully defined) context contains a more complex example of disturbed chronology. Rather than reordering events, the poet repeats the narration of them; thus we have the narrator's opening third person account of the fall of Troy and flight of the survivors, then the questions posed by Dido's courtiers implying some knowledge of events, then the narrator's summary of what Eneas tells them, and, finally, Eneas' first-person account. This sequential accumulation of retellings moves closer and closer to the coincidence of witness and narrator, a dual identity which Eneas claims in order to lend weight to his version of events. The legend of Troy circulates in an unstable poetic economy in the *Roman d'Eneas*, and continues to mutate until the point at which someone who claims both knowledge and first-hand testimony to events can bring *res* and *verba* together in a version which, on account of the supposed reliability of the narrator, replaces all others. Returning to the image of the *involucrum*, the ultimate tailor of the history of Troy is the

¹⁰ In this respect, we should perhaps view this succession of re-tellings as a corollary to Marilyn Desmond's interpretation of the poet-narrator as a re-worker of earlier material: 'The language does not represent an event, but transforms an earlier linguistic representation of an event. In order to describe this scene, the speaker had first to read an earlier version of it.' *Reading Dido*, p. 106.

¹¹ For a wide-ranging study of the influence of commentaries and glosses on medieval Latin and vernacular interpretations of the *Aeneid*, including the *Roman d'Eneas*, see Christopher Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, especially pp. 168-216. On the more direct influence of the poetry of antiquity on the *Eneas*, with a particular focus on Ovid, see Edmond Faral, *Recherches sur les sources latines des contes et romans courtois du moyen age* (Paris: Champion, 1913), p. 73-157.

¹² Jean-Charles Huchet, *Le roman médiéval* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1984), p. 176-8.

one who has handled the materials himself, but while he cannot choose the materials he works with he still has the power to cut them as it suits him.

The question of knowledge proclaimed and explanation evaded also appears in the speech of Dido as she welcomes the Trojans into her land. She empathizes with their suffering at the loss of their home, as she too has experienced exile:

‘Bien soy l’aventure troiaine,
Comfaitement li Grieu l’ont prise,
Toute la terre a essil mise,
Car ce ay je tout assaié.’ (ll. 577-80)

‘I know the story of Troy well, and how the Greeks captured it and laid waste all of its lands, for I too have experienced it.’

However, what the *Eneas* poet omits in his poem is the account of how she came to know of the plight of the Trojans, which is explored in greater detail by Virgil:

‘Atque equidem Teucrum memini Sidonia venire
Finibus expulsum patriis, nova regna petentem
Auxilio Beli; genitor tum Belus opimam
Vastabat Cyprum et victor dicione tenebat.
[...]
Me quoque per multos similis fortuna lobores
lactatam hac demum voluit consistere terra.
Non ignara mali miseris succurrere disco.’ (1. 619-22, 628-30)

‘Indeed, I myself remember well Teucer’s coming to Sidon, when exiled from his native land he sought a new kingdom by aid of Belus; my father Belus was then wasting rich Cyprus, and held it under his victorious sway. [...] Me, too, has a like fortune driven through many toils, and willed that in this land I should at last find rest. Not ignorant of ill I learn to aid distress.’

The extra information supplied by Virgil paints a picture of the Mediterranean as a complex and conflicted site of multiple occupations, where competing kingdoms and empires clash, and are sometimes allies, sometimes foes. It also makes Dido part of an eastern Mediterranean network of rulers and power bases; this in turn makes plausible her foreknowledge of the Trojans’ circumstances, since she is knowledgeable about history as well as skilled in politics. Short of presuming the pernicious ‘fama’ or ‘rumor’ which subsequently ruins Dido’s reputation, the Anglo-Norman poem gives no clear

explanation of how she knows who to ask about. This may be a symptom of the *Eneas* poet's rebalancing of the relative and distinct significances of the queen and her city in favour of Carthage. Nevertheless, this occlusion of Dido's knowledge enhances the portrayal of Eneas as the privileged communicator of knowledge.

Further to this, the omission of Teucer as an additional Trojan ancestor is another example of how Eneas and the *Eneas* poet streamline the foundation narrative of Troy.¹³ This careful editing of origins and previous alliances in territorial disputes is again brought to light in Eneas's first encounter with Evander. In this meeting, he identifies himself as acting upon the will of the gods, but also makes clear his political and military intentions. There are, however, two particular elements in this speech which subtly alter the significance of the Trojans' sudden appearance in Italy, in comparison with the *Aeneid*'s version of this scene. In the French poem, there is no mention of the connection between the Arcadians and the Greeks, as there is in the Latin; nor does Eneas invoke the shared genealogy of his people and Evander's, which Virgil's hero makes clear: 'The lineage of us both branches from one blood' (8. 142). This expresses a certain ambiguity; it asserts a blood relationship between Evander's and Aeneas's people, but in so doing it problematizes the Arcadians' previous association with the Trojans' enemies. Turnus is evoked as a common enemy in both Latin and vernacular, but the terms Eneas uses to describe their conflict are reminiscent of holy war:

'Ça ou li dieu ont commandé
Somes venu a quelque paine,
.I. chastel avons en demaine.
Turnus nous vee le païs,
De guerre s'est envers nous pris:
Il veult nostre chastel abatre,
Encontre nous se veult combatre.
Vers les diex a pris ceste guerre
Qui nous octroient la terre:
Ou bel lor soit ou mal lor sache,
Ce m'est avis qu'il nous en chace.' (II. 4800-10)

¹³ Patrick Geary notes a pattern similar to this in the widespread recuperation (or outright invention) of Carolingian origins by religious communities later in the Middle Ages; in commenting on the abbey of Montmajour in Provence, founded in 949 in memory of the Lotharingian Hugo, king of Italy, he reads the disregard of subsequent generations for the founder and simultaneous embrace of the larger Carolingian-international identity he embodied as a means of neutralizing a potentially troublesome inheritance. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millenium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 135-46.

‘We have come through great strife to the land the gods told us to find, and we have built a castle on it. Turnus refuses to cede this land to us, and is at war with us. He wants to knock down our castle and fight us. He is waging war against the gods who promised us the land: whether it pleases them or not, I believe that he will drive us out.’

The *Eneas* poet does not, however, invoke the immediate threat the Greeks pose to the Arcadians in the *Aeneid* (7. 146-49); in the medieval text, the Greeks are enemies in the past, in a battle which has no relevance to the current situation. The concentration upon the story of Eneas overshadows the kinds of historic grudge which spill out in the *Roman de Brut*, the chronology of Eneas’s heirs, which recounts Membritius’s advice to Brutus regarding the Greeks’ implacable desire for revenge. These points in the *Roman d’Eneas* work to erode difference and reshape the past while redefining the very nature of the Trojans’ struggle to establish themselves in their new ‘herité’.

Eneas’ failure to acknowledge the shared history of the Greeks and Arcadians can be read as another editorial decision, this time on the part of the poet rather than of his ‘Eneas’. It exemplifies the theme of strategic forgetting which is established in the edited account given at Dido’s court and is a more fully realized historicizing strategy in the French poem than in its source. Eneas is a more stridently assured figure than his ancient counterpart (at least in the section between the exit from the underworld and the initiation of his ‘amors’ with Lavine), and less troubled by the memory of Troy. The statement of his case, from which the above excerpt is taken, traces a clear connection between his own interests and those of his host:¹⁴

‘Roys, ne te tourt mie a enui
ce que je di : de Troie sui,
Anchisés ot a non mon pere,
Venuz, le deuesse, est ma mere.
Quant la cité destruisirent Grieu,
si me commanderent li dieu
que a toute ma compaignie
m’en venisse en Lombardie,
la dont nostre ancestre fu nez,
qui Dardanus fu appelez,
qui fonda Troie la cité.
[...]

¹⁴ Following the description of Eneas’ happiness at what he has learned in the underworld, we are told that ‘Enz en son cuer en a grant joie, / oublié a le duel de Troie...’ (ll. 3072-73: ‘In his heart he has great joy, he has forgotten the sorrow of Troy...’).

En la contree avons oï
 que il vous ra moult acouilli
 et guerroié tant longuement.
 Por force et por maintenant,
 sommes yci a toy venuz,
 que nous secores par vertu.
 Se tu me veulz auques aidier
 et de ta gent auques baillier,
 je vencherray et toy et moy,
 a brief terme serons recoy.
 Se par toy puis fenir ma guerre,
 mon anemi vaintre et conquerre,
 toute m'onnor tendroy de toy,
 la seignourie t'en octroy.' (ll. 4789-99, 4811-24)

'King, do not be angered by what I say: I am from Troy, Anchises was my father and the goddess Venus is my mother. When the Greeks destroyed the city, the gods ordered me to take my people and come to Lombardy with them, the place where our ancestor Dardanus, the founder of Troy, was born. [...] We have heard throughout the country that [Turnus] has long harried and fought you. We have come to you in search of your support and protection. If you want to help me and give me some of your men, I will avenge you and myself and we will soon be at peace. If you can help me bring an end to my war and defeat my enemy, I will hold all my lands from you, and recognize your lordship over them.'

While the first part of this speech may be read as a highly condensed reiteration of the Troy story, it can also, more interestingly, be seen as a further refinement of Eneas's vision of his own destiny. Eneas has by this point heard and witnessed Anchises's prophecy, and the conclusion of his period in the underworld with the forgetting of the suffering at Troy (and his retained memory of bearing witness to his lineage's glorious future) implies that there is a second part to his story, to which the first part must be matched for both political and artistic effect. This leaves no room for ambiguity, and Eneas takes the opportunity to present his peoples' tragic past of victimhood and their future triumph as a continuous, ineluctable narrative. Moreover, this is a narrative into which he cannily inscribes Evander as a feudal lord, setting up the social model which must ultimately be superseded, first in Eneas's assumption of the late Pallas's inheritance, and then in Eneas's solo victory over Turnus. Much of the justification for assigning the *Roman d'Eneas* a pivotal role in the development of romance rests upon its shift from the feudal values embodied in Turnus to the individualist and courtly concerns of Eneas, wherein legitimacy is based upon vertical genealogical bonds rather than

horizontal bonds based on oaths and service.¹⁵ While it is easy to identify Turnus as ‘the embattled protector of values newly archaic in the middle of the twelfth century’, Eneas’s adoption of a similar tactic in this episode may appear more unusual, particularly given the broader context of the French poem. However, as Baswell argues:

The French poem’s insertion of feudal obligation and law into an ancient epic context, far from being a naïve ‘modernization’ by a redactor unable to understand his source, is a canny prehistory and legitimation of his culture’s recent war over imperial inheritance, and that culture’s wish to move past feudal war and into judicial order.¹⁶

This rhetorical manoeuvre is an essential precursor to the prophesied conquest of the ancestral territory. Eneas is as skilful a manipulator of political perception as of narrative, and this gesture of servitude in return for military support is evidence of his recognition of diplomatic reality.

The Greeks are presented in this speech solely as the destroyers of Troy, and the relationship between them and Evander’s people goes unmentioned:

‘non equidem extimui Danaum quod doctor et Arcas
quodque a stirpe fores geminis coniunctus Atridis;
sed mea me virtus et sancta oracula divum
cognatique patres, tua terries didita fama,
coniunxeretibi et fatis egere volentem.’ (8. 129-33)

‘I was not afraid that you were a Danaan chief, an Arcadian and linked by blood with the twin sons of Atreus; but my own worth and Heaven’s holy oracles, our ancestral kinship, and your fame that has spread throughout the world, have bound me to you, and led me here as Fate’s willing follower.’

Just as Eneas states the case for his people’s right to the land they claim, he also represents their conquerors as a triumphant but isolated group. This classificatory move, enacting a separation which mirrors the excision of Greece from the poem’s *translatio imperii* model (Carthage-Rome), is followed by a gesture towards alliance in the

¹⁵ Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, pp. 92-127; Christopher Baswell, ‘Men in the Roman d’Eneas: The Construction of Empire’, in Clare A. Lees (ed.) *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, Medieval Cultures, 7 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 149-68. On the relationship between Eneas and Evander, see Zrinka Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages: Translatio, Kinship and Metaphor* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), pp. 27-28.

¹⁶ Baswell, ‘Men in the Roman d’Eneas’, p. 160.

subsequent lines, in which Evander recalls his own visit to Troy and his prior acquaintance with both Priam and Anchises (ll. 4828-38).¹⁷ Eneas's pragmatism in this appeal to the king is empire-building in action. In representing Turnus as the greatest threat to Evander, the Trojan defines conflict as immediate and localized, smoothing over all previous alliances other than the Arcadian's friendship with Anchises. In place of these, Eneas insists upon his status as the son of a goddess, a strategy which evokes an authority greater than the king himself or his enemies and makes Eneas himself a unique figure, whether as ally or adversary.

The appeal to higher authorities and their guarantee of the supremacy of the Trojans is reinforced in Eneas's speech prior to the planned single combat with Turnus. In what is another amplification by the *Eneas* poet, the protagonist sets out in legalistic language his claim to Lavine and her father's lands. This speech repeats the main elements of the arguments of the passages discussed above, but its location on the closed field on the morning of the duel makes clear the close relationship between rhetoric and violence. Eneas defines himself verbally here, as he has done throughout the text, and at this point comparison with the poem's two model soldiers, Pallas and Camille, becomes necessary. His status as storyteller sets him apart from these figures, who we might characterise as pure warriors insofar as they do not seem to have any non-martial dimension to their characters. Their violent deaths in battle imply a certain disengagement from the process of narration; they have no connection either to the origins of the conflict between Eneas and Turnus or to its end. This orderly and formal preamble to a prearranged duel (which, unknown to the speakers, is about to erupt into another pitched battle) is the image of an idealized forum for the settling of disputes, that is, one in which everyone plays by the rules. Notably, this follows the protracted lovesickness of Eneas and Lavine, which employs the rhetorical conventions of *ars amatoria* and its imagery of war and conflict. Eneas' speech is another example of how the Anglo-Norman poem foregrounds him as a storyteller, as there is no corresponding passage or moment of oratory at this point in the *Aeneid*.

¹⁷ David Rollo's reading of the *translatio studii* passage in Chrétien's *Cligés* notes its omission of Britain and positions the text as a counterweight to Geoffrey of Monmouth's (and Wace's) claim for Arthur's Britain as a power to match Rome or Greece. Rollo, *Glamorous Sorcery: Magic and Literacy in the High Middle Ages*, Medieval Cultures, 25 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 167.

The 'mannerliness' of this scene is underscored by its circumstances. Eneas pre-empts the Latins' criticisms of him by making his case prior to arming:

Ainçois que uns d'eus s'i armast
 Ne que sairement y jurast,
 Moustra Eneas sa raison,
 Tout soy le roy et li baron :
 'Seignor, mon droit mostrer vous veul,
 Que il ne me tort a orgueil
 Que par force veuille conquere
 Autrui honnor ne autrui terre.' (ll. 9395-402)

Before either of them had armed or sworn a vow, Eneas spoke in his own defence, and the king and all the lords listened: 'Lords, I want you to see what I am due, and to know that it is not out of pride that I would wish to capture anyone else's fiefs or lands.'

The fact that Eneas is unarmed is of vital dramatic importance in the subsequent action, where he is caught off-guard, but his speaking at this precise moment is a subversion of the law of Latinus, whose request that the combatants swear on his gods before the duel goes unanswered. Latinus's paralysis is made even clearer in his subsequent retreat from the battlefield with his gods, a passage which also makes a slyly iconoclastic jibe at the pagan king: 'En tost fuïr miex se fioit / Qu'en touz les diex que il portoit' (ll. 9499-9500: He put more faith in a quick getaway than in all the gods he could carry). By getting in first, Eneas once again takes control of proceedings. Here we see a clearer affirmation that force may be necessary to guarantee the rights he claims from the authority of the gods and the prior word of the king:

'Li dameldieu d'illuec me pristrent,
 Ça m'envoierent el païs
 Dont mon ancestre fu naïs;
 Octroyee m'ont toute Ytaire,
 Qui fu mon aire et mon treaire.
 Quant arivay en cest païs,
 Mes messaiges au roy tramis,
 Qu'il me consentist en sa terre:
 N'en sordroit ja por nous guerre.
 Il me manda soie merci
 Que ce seüse bien de fi
 Que la terre m'otroieroit,
 O sa fille le me donroit.' (ll. 9414-26)

'The gods [of Troy] spoke to me, and sent to the country of my ancestor's birth; they promised me the whole of Italy, which was my birth-right. When I arrived in this country, I sent a message to the king to request his permission for me to enter his land: we gave no threat of war. By his grace, he replied that he would consent to give me the land and his daughter.'

As Eneas verbally stakes out his territory, and offers the words of the gods to back up his claim, he sets up a dramatic volte-face at the end of the speech, where he addresses Latinus directly:

'Et se je puis celui conquerre
Qui me desfent yceste terre,
Bien vous promet, fait il au roy,
Tant com vivrez, que ja por moy
Ne serez descreüs de rien.
Vostre terre maintenez bien,
Mais donnez moy, a une part,
O vostre fille par esgart,
Ou faire puisse une cité,
Après vous aie l'erité.' (Il. 9437-46)

He said to the king: 'And if I am able to defeat the one who keeps me from this land, I promise you that for as long as you live I will cause you no trouble. You will continue to govern your land, but give me your daughter and a portion of the land where I can build a city, which will pass to me when you die.'

These lines accentuate Eneas's public deference to Latinus. By presenting a scenario whereby enduring peace following this closely observed combat seems to be assured, Eneas makes the king a part of the peace while guaranteeing his own place as his successor. After the summary of the events leading up to this moment, in which he makes clear his 'droit', he retreats to claim that all he wants is Lavine and enough land for a home for his people, rather than the entire territory which had been promised first to Turnus, then to him. In creating the impression that what he wants is actually less than his share, he sets himself up as a counterpoint to Turnus and to Dido, whose city was founded through cunning interpretation of the rules rather than through force or diplomacy. He is, in this indirect self portrait, a magnanimous and humble subject, and the king grants his request that his people be allowed to leave in peace if he is defeated. However, Latinus fails to respond to this latter request before the unrest in Turnus's

company reignites the battle. Eneas redirects his ambitions towards the woman he secretly desires, but his drawing attention to what will happen when the king dies also suggests that he is thinking forward to Lavine's inheritance. The 'erité', therefore, is doubly guaranteed by Latinus and Anchises, the latter of whom had prophesied the eventual triumph of Eneas's line in the temporally dislocated space of the underworld. The underworld must, in my view, be regarded as a space rather than as a place, as it mimics many of the features of the world above, but which cannot be seen by the ordinary living as anything other than inconceivable. This apparent contraction of demands masks an adherence to the longer term promise of the hero's father. Huchet's reading of the *Roman d'Eneas* interprets the poem as an attempt to displace malignant female (especially maternal) authority and promote male (especially paternal) figures who can offer a guarantee of patrilineal continuity and legitimacy, as in the power shift between Vulcan and Venus.¹⁸ However, we may also see, as does Paul Rockwell, a subtle hint towards the rejection of the father figure in the underworld episode through Eneas's failed attempts to embrace Anchises. According to Rockwell, who draws on the curious historic appeal of Trojan origins in European national foundation myths:

A community like the French exiles in England of the thirteenth century, who might have desired to reformulate their myths of origin in ways that deemphasized the failures of their ancestors, would not necessarily view Eneas's failure to embrace the father's image in entirely negative terms. The father, after all, is dead. Troy was destroyed. The ancestors lost the war. As Gauvain maintained in *Erec*, inherited customs might cause more problems than they solve.¹⁹

The paternal prophecy is not disclosed in Eneas's speech before the battle, but this narrative of inheritance arches over everything that happens in between the moment of its enunciation and the fulfillment of the first part of the promise that Lavine will be the mother of his son (ll. 3018-19). The poem thus ends with a beginning, after the men of Latinus and Turnus have submitted to Eneas and he has married Lavine:

Roys en fu, et belle Lavine
Sa cortoise mouillier roïne,
Et vesquirent en bonne pais
Tant com de lor jors y ot mais,

¹⁸ Huchet, *Le roman medieval*, p. 94.

¹⁹ Rockwell, 'The Failed Embrace of the Father: Historical Continuity in *Le Chevalier as deus espees* and *Le roman d'Eneas*', *Romance Quarterly*, 51. 1 (2004), 2-14 (p. 5).

Sanz anui, sanz destor de guerre.
 Ainssi vint la latine terre
 A Eneas, qui premerains
 Des royaus la tint en ses mainz
 Puis que il ot conquis Turnus.
 L'istoire faut, il n'i a plus
 Qu'a metre face en mémoire. (ll. 10321-31)

He was king, and Lavine, his beautiful and courteous wife, was queen, and they lived in peace for all of their days, without trouble or war. This is how the Latin land came to be ruled by Eneas, who was the first king to rule it after his defeat of Turnus. The story is over; all that remains is for it to be preserved for posterity.

Despite the prominent position here granted to Lavine, she is still a secondary concern in comparison with the land and, more significantly, the maintenance of its peace. Eneas is, above all, the ruler of the Latin lands, and the naming of him as 'premerains' indicates a re-evaluation of the meaning of the term 'la terre latine'. The poet's use of this expression instead of, for example, referring to the eventual imperial centre Anchises predicts will be founded by Eneas's descendant (l. 3034: 'Icil tuen niais Rome fera'), or to the geographical entity named as his birthright by the gods (ll. 9417-18: 'Octroyee m'ont toute Ytaire, / qui fu mon aire et mon treaire'), indicates a continuity between the relocated Trojans and the romance-speaking (and partially Latinate) audience of the *Roman d'Eneas*. In drawing a firm line under the life of Eneas with the expression 'l'istoire faut', the poet appears to conclude this narrative with a positive assertion of the king's right to rule. There is much support for this reading of the poem in the historical context of the Plantagenet court for which it was produced, with Henry II in the early years of his reign likely to have been flattered by the poem's depiction of a strong king who puts down troublesome rivals.²⁰ Yet there is also evidence in the poem that the Trojan heritage claimed by Western European rulers is not without complications. The poem's place in a codicological meta-narrative of westward expansion and transfer of power is troubled by elements which disrupt linear progression or fold history back on itself, disturbing Eneas's finely tuned narrative of origins and destiny. It is to these elements that this chapter now turns.

²⁰ See Baswell's comments on the Trojan material produced by Henry's tutors and likely to have been read by the young prince. (*Virgil in Medieval England*, pp. 42-46)

2. Misremembering Troy

The figure of Hector casts a long shadow in writing on the Trojan War. Prior the twelfth century, however, Hector does not enjoy the exemplary heroic reputation implied in such contemporary texts as the *Roman de Troie* or, later, Christine de Pizan's *Epistre Othéa*.²¹ Although the *Eneas* omits one of the most striking episodes to feature Hector in Virgil's text – his apparition to Aeneas in a dream at the same time as the city is falling to the Greeks, telling him to flee (2. 289-95) – it still makes poignant and thought-provoking reference to the dead warrior. Instead of bolstering the Trojans' sense of nationhood through connection to their past, memories of Hector in the *Eneas* provoke discomfort. This is obvious in Eneas's encounter with his dead companions in the underworld, but a more subtle and complex example is the description of the gonfalon captured by Hector from Protesilaus at the opening of the war with the Greeks. The gonfalon appears most immediately to be a symbol of triumph, and the regal associations of its colours, purple and gold, should signify the Trojans' assertions of their right to rule the land which, we are repeatedly reminded, was governed by their ancestors. Prominent also is the poets' insistence on primacy:

Soz Troie le conquist Hector
Quant il Prothelasem occist,
Qui la premiere juste y fist ;
Primes y vint o son effors,
Primes joust, primes fu mors. (ll. 4355-59)

Hector captured it before Troy when he killed Protesilaus, who was the first to strike; he was the first to push forwards, the first to strike, the first to die.

The central position of this symbol in the defensive preparation for the siege of Montauban appears to augur well for the forthcoming battle, as it recalls a moment of victory. However, the repetition of 'primes' indicates the singularity of this event, isolating it from the context of a war in which Hector was killed and his people defeated. It lacks the certainty of Eneas's being 'premerains' among kings of the Latin lands, as the

²¹ Paul Oorts, 'The Reputation of the Trojan Prince Hector in the Middle Ages' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1993). On the *Epistre Othéa*, which makes much of the French monarchy's claim to Trojan ancestry, see Sandra L. Hindman, *Christine de Pizan's "Epistre Othéa": Painting and Politics at the Court of Charles VI*, Studies and Texts, 77 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1986), pp. 24-36.

temporal frame of the poem has Hector dead before its beginning and Eneas the living king at its end. The insistence that Hector was the first to claim a Greek scalp can be read, in association with the omission of his haggard, blood-stained and tearful dream-appearance, as an attempt to erase the memory of his tragic end. It can also be interpreted as a reorganization of the historical narrative, calculated to de-emphasize the Judgment of Paris or Eneas's flight from the ruins of Troy as alternative points of origin for the prehistory of the new Troy, and foreground, however briefly, the prowess of an already heroic figure. Such a strategy is a necessary part of the adoption of the Trojans, who failed to defend their city, as ancestors to the medieval nobility of western Europe; the fall of Troy is marginalized in the references to individual moments of valour.

Baswell also identifies the gonfalon as a significant object betraying uncertainty about Trojan superiority. His analysis of this object detects a nervous undertone to an apparently assertive gesture by drawing a comparison with the colours worn by Dido.²² He compares it with the pennon given to Eneas by Venus to complement the arms forged for him by Vulcan; it was woven by Pallas in her contest with Arachne, and, though the detail is not given in the *Eneas*, it pictures the triumph of the gods over the mortals, while Arachne's weaving (for which she is punished by being turned into a spider) represents the violence of the gods towards mortal women (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, book 6, ll. 70-100). Baswell interprets this allusion to the punishment of an outspoken woman as part of the text's strategy of containment of feminine challenge to patriarchal authority, which can also be applied to the equally contrived act of national myth-making. The *Eneas* poet suggests in this reminiscence that through the reference to a specific trophy the hero ought only to be remembered as a victor, with the 'forgetting' of the events at Troy being demonstrably selective.

A further hint at the troublesome legacy of Troy appears in Tarchon's goading of the Volscian queen Camille in the course of the second battle at Latium. While this episode has been extensively commented upon for its representation of gender, it is also problematic in its representation of money.²³ By reinterpreting this verbal attack, the

²² Baswell, *Virgil in Medieval England*, pp. 181-95.

²³ See, for example, Daniel Poirion, 'De l'*Enéide* à l'*Eneas*: mythologie et moralisation,' *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, 19 (1976), 213-29; Noah D. Guynn, *Allegory and Sexual Ethics in the High Middle Ages*, The New Middle Ages Series (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 63-67. See also Huchet, *Le roman médiéval*, and Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*.

scene's political and historical dimensions are foregrounded. The image of Trojan gold can be taken as a starting point for an examination of the text's concern with objects and their origins, and its ambiguity may work to blur or merge what Sarah Kay identifies as genre-specific object relations.²⁴ The *Eneas* poet replicates fairly closely Virgil's account of Tarchon's call to the Trojans, but inserts a remarkably personal diatribe directed at the queen. He claims that there is no place for women on the battlefield, and that they may only subdue men in the bedroom: 'femme ne doit mie combatre / se par nuit non et en gissant, / la puet faire homme recreant...' (ll. 7142-44: A woman should not fight except at night, on her back. Then she can put her effort into man's idle pleasure...). He moves from condemnation of her 'desmesurance' (l. 7147) to a lewd proposition:

'Je ne vous veul mie *acheter*.
 Pour quant blanche vous voi et bloie:
 .III. deniers ai ci de Troie,
 Qui sont moult bon, de fin or tuit;
 Ceuz vous donra por mon deduit
 Une piece mener o vous;
 Je n'en seray point trop jalous,
Bailleray aus escuiers.
 Bien vous veul *vendre* mes deniers:
 Se tant y perch, point ne m'en plaing,
 Vous en avrez double *gaaing*:
 L'un ert que de mon or avrez,
 L'autre que vostre bon ferez;
 Mais ne vous souffiroit naient,
 Je cuit, se il estoient cent;
 Vous en porriez estre lassee,
 Mais ne seriez mie saoulee.' (ll. 7156-72, emphasis mine)

('I don't want to buy you. But still, I see that you are fair and blonde: I have here four deniers from Troy, which are good and made from pure gold. I will give them to you in return for a bit of what I fancy with you. I won't be too greedy with you, I'll give you out to my servants. I really want to sell you my coins; if I lose them, it's no great loss, and you will have a double profit: you will have my gold, and you'll have a good time. But I don't think it would be enough for you supposing there were a hundred of them. You might be worn out, but you'd never be satisfied.')

²⁴ 'The romance quest, turning the other into a thing to be appropriated, and placing the emphasis on the subject's self-enrichment through acquisition, belongs in a rhetoric of the commodity. The conflicts of the chansons de geste, by contrast, with their play of encounter and separation, intimacy and hostility, appeal to a rhetoric of the gift: the interminably fluctuating and ambiguous relations between transactors are given priority over the relation of either to any specific transaction.' Kay, *The Chansons de geste in the Age of Romance*, p. 51.

In a medieval military context where every man has his price, it should not be surprising that a female warrior might also be valued in financial terms. However, the price Tarchon offers for access to Camille's body clearly and specifically refers to prostitution. As Tarchon, identified by the Eneas poet as 'i. Troiens' (in comparison with Virgil's 'Etruscan Tarchon') assesses her worth, however, he is moved not to a definitive conclusion of what it would cost to possess her, but anxiety over calculating her price.

This anxiety leads us to a consideration of what this speech implies about the Trojans. The reference back to where the gold *deniers* came from might be read as subtly encapsulating Eneas' people's fear and uncertainty about their own status. Concern with the uses of money and the circulation of goods is repeatedly hinted at throughout this speech through Tarchon's vocabulary of buying and selling ('acheter', 'vendre', 'gaaing') as well as through his statement of how he will treat the object he wishes to buy ('bailleray aus escuiers'). His suggestion of Camille's insatiability is, on one level, a crude and conventional misogynistic speculation on her sexual appetite, but it also hints towards the desire for material wealth which is Camille's undoing; she is killed when she stops to claim Chloreus' gold helmet, made from the same base material as the coins.²⁵ Is he talking about a hundred men, or a hundred gold coins? This ambiguous signification suggests a fear that a hundred 'deniers de Troie' might be worth no more than the four he initially offers her.²⁶ While the various portable goods Eneas had managed to carry off from Troy form links in associative networks between people and groups (including the living and the dead, as well as those not present in the text), Trojan money could be seen to be of negligible worth, with money's function as a unit for exchange which facilitates mobility at odds with the Trojans' desire for settlement. It can be exchanged for other goods, but lacks the memorial dimension of gifts and trophies which serve to anchor those who give and receive or win them within a narrative economy. While the material from which the Trojan money is made is desirable in any form, it becomes here a reminder of the empty treasury of the lost city, an emblem of failure.

²⁵ This is a thought-provoking parallel to the description of Eneas in the *Roman de Troie*: 'Mout ot engin, mout ot veisdie / E mout coveita manantie.' (ll. 5471-72: 'He was very clever and sly, and loved riches.').

²⁶ The author's implication that Tarchon is anxious about the value of his money may refer obliquely to the debasement of the Byzantine gold *nomisma* in the eleventh century; following the reform of coinage by Alexios Komnenos, *nomisma* of widely varying value continued to circulate. See Alan Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 89-91.

Currency from a state which no longer exists is a shadow disturbing the transfer of the Trojan people from their old land to the new one. This disturbance of the transition from people in exile to newly rooted citizens is echoed in the episode of Camille's funeral, a prolonged event which affects the notion of unity and fulfilment of the prophetic promise underpinning the whole narrative. Camille's amplified role in the *Eneas* highlights the points of opposition between various figures in the text, notably Eneas, Pallas and Turnus.²⁷ She has few ties to anyone else, and her relationship with Turnus is cast in a strictly feudal-military light. This isolation becomes particularly clear in the contrasts between her and Pallas, a figure whom she otherwise closely resembles in their shared devotion to *prouescet*. Pallas's body is borne back to his father after his death at Turnus's hands, and it is placed in the ornate tomb which had been constructed for Evander. In this detail, an innovation on the part of the *Eneas* poet, the built landscape of Pallanteia already testifies to the death of its old line of rulers, a shift brought painfully to the fore in the grief of Evander and the queen at having to bury their son. This is a derailment of the patrilineal succession insisted upon by the *Eneas* poet in the reassertions of the relationship between Eneas and Anchises, but the traumatic break is necessary to the establishment of the 'new Troy'; one line must end for another to become dominant. The scene exemplifies how the breaking of dynasties (with beneficial results for Eneas) happens at a remove from the main narrative. Pallas's grief-stricken mother's curses will have no bearing on the Trojans' fate. There is no-one left to avenge Pallas except Eneas himself, and he and his descendants will eventually take control of what would have been Pallas's inheritance.

Camille's entombment differs from Pallas's in that her sepulchre, like Dido's, is built especially for her. While there is no delay in the burial of Pallas, Camille's people grieve for three months while her tomb is being built.²⁸ This slow, meticulous construction of something intended to serve as a memorial also contrasts with Eneas's tent, erected to seem as if a castle has appeared overnight, but not intended to last; pointedly, the

²⁷ In an interestingly oppositional vein, Poirion notes Camille's place in the text's portrayals of contrasting women: 'Celle-ci apparaît en effet comme l'antithèse psychologique de Lavinia, comme Didon en était l'antithèse morale.' (p. 228).

²⁸ Baswell uses the term 'romance dilation' to characterize a slowing down or interruption of the narrative's progress (e.g. Dido's attempts to delay Eneas, and the efforts taken to prevent the putrefaction of the bodies of Pallas and Camille), and sees its use in the *Eneas* as particularly associated with the feminine, but in an ambiguous manner: 'It is this double power of dilation – both to make space for the feminine and erotic, and to contain their effects by making them into artifacts – that most deeply characterizes the "romance Aeneid".' (*Virgil in Medieval England*, p. 173).

episode with the tent comes just before Camille's funeral. This pairing of locations creates a sense that time is passing at different speeds in different places, a temporal split mirroring territorial division within the Trojans' promised land of 'toute Ytaire'. Given that only three weeks elapse between the declaration of truce and the marriage of Eneas and Lavine, the grand royal union is taking place at the same time as, somewhere offstage, the Volscians are still building their memorial to Camille. The extended period of mourning for Camille takes this episode beyond the end point of the main narrative. This functions as a subtle marginal interruption to the history framed by Anchises in the underworld, a narrative in which prophetic paternal promise is fulfilled as the father and, less emphatically, the gods had declared.²⁹ Camille's disturbing exceptionalism persists beyond her death, problematizing the ideal of unity proposed by the dead father whose son becomes the first in a line of emperors over newly unified territory.

This ambivalence also appears in the structure of Camille's tomb itself, which is arguably modelled on the tower of the mythical Christian king, Prester John.³⁰ The defensive function of the mirror turns it into something more than a memorial structure, since it shows enemies before they arrive, again disjoining time, like the prophecy. However, the medium through which the 'future' can here be seen is an inert object, not a being (living or spectral) endowed with the ability to describe and interpret the future. The mirror images are just images, whereas the future heirs of Eneas are persons in the zone of oblivion who will eventually leave the underworld and enter the world of the living. The father can speak, and can identify those yet to be born as actors in an historical drama known to the reader with the benefit of hindsight; the mirror can only show, and, as the Trojans in particular should be aware, appearances cannot always be trusted.³¹ The usefulness of the mirror depends on presumption either that you know what your enemy looks like or that you treat any outsider as an enemy. Although this object is never

²⁹ Huchet reads this interruption as a foundational moment in the emergence of a new literary genre: 'Le portrait de Camille constitue une excroissance, un « surplus », grâce à quoi l'*Eneas* s'arrache à son modèle latin et à l'épopée pour inaugurer l'ère du roman.' (*Le Roman médiéval*, p. 68.)

³⁰ On the design and significance of Prester John's mirror-topped tower, the most enduring element in the various European versions of his myth, see Michael Uebel, *Ecstatic Transformations: On the Uses of Alterity in the Middle Ages*, The New Middle Ages (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 93-99.

³¹ This reading sets Camille's tomb against Uebel's view of Prester John's mirror as a symbol of his gaze, which constitutes his mastery over all that come within sight of his tower: 'Prester John's anti-nomadic physics of power depends upon the arrangement of an alterity that stops, so to speak, to recognize itself in the mirror.' (p. 97). We might, however, regard the redundancy of Camille's mirror as an oblique hint to the end of the Trojans' nomadic wandering, and as a harbinger of their descendant's consolidation of power across Italy.

discussed as being of any practical use to the Volscians, the very fact of the mirror's not being used suggests the extinction of a deviant militarism embodied in the woman who rests in the tomb upon which the mirror is mounted. With Camille, Pallas and Turnus all dead, Eneas is able to take his place as the son who inherits all – the only living future for Italy is that of the line of Eneas and Lavine. It could be concluded that, in spite of its disturbance of the linear narrative of triumph over adversity set out by Anchises, Camille's funeral is an awkward footnote to Eneas' rise to power. In light of this, the claim that '*jamais ne fust conquis par guerre*' (l. 7674: 'it was never won through war'), referring to Camille's monumental sepulchre, is a hint forwards to her people's eventual capitulation to the rule of Rome. While the narrative's return to the prophesied 'line' appears to foreclose this deviation, though, and symbolizes it in the image of an inert reflective screen mounted on an impenetrable monument, there is no escaping the troubling implications this episode has for the notion of linear history.

3. Carthage: at the edge or in the middle?

The Carthage of the *Roman d'Eneas* is, like Camille's tomb, a quintessential example of the *merveilleux* characterizing the romance genre it arguably initiates. For Eneas and his companions it is an alluring respite from the seas, but the longer they stay there the more they long to leave, as the city and its queen are distractions from the journey to the as-yet-unknown fatherland. It is a location which is at the same time an essential resting point in the journey, but one which can apparently be consigned to the footnotes of post-Troy Trojan history. The ease with which Dido seems to be sidelined might render the Carthage episode a self-contained hiatus. Yet its resonances elsewhere in the text – in visual spectacle, vocabulary, and in the recalling of Eneas's treatment of Dido by Lavine's mother – suggest that this marginalized middle, which is more like an unworldly space than an inhabited place, casts a shadow over the other cities and settlements of the text. The impression of Carthage created in the poem is one of a city which would have been 'out of place' wherever it was built, but it might equally be seen as a city which could stand for any other. It is a technological marvel destined to be superseded, and its representation as one in a sequence of power centres suggests an underlying fear of

decay and obsolescence, a fate which has to a large extent befallen Rome by the period in which the *Eneas* is written:

Celle cité ferma Dydo,
 Et ce vouloit dame Juno,
 Pour ce qu'illuec fu coultivee,
 Cartaigne fu moult renommee.
 Touz li mons fu a lui enclin:
 De son enpire ne fust fin.
 La Capitoille et le Senné
 Y avoit ja tout ordené
 Qui esgardent les jujemens
 Et les loys donnaissent aus gens;
 Puis fu a Rome tranporté
 Li Capitoilles et li Senné.
 Encore dont ne par ert mie
 Celle cité toute fornie:
 Encor faisoit Dydo ouvrier
 Aus murs, aus tors pour miauz fremer. (ll. 500-15)

Dido built this city, with the blessing of lady Juno, and because she was venerated there Carthage was renowned. All the world was under its power: its empire was unlimited. The Capitol and the Senate were founded there to house its judgments and laws; then the Capitol and Senate were transported to Rome. At that point, the city had not been fully built: Dido's labourers were still working on the walls and towers to better protect it.

This authorial intervention, which plays around with sequence, offers an example of the dynamics of *translatio imperii*. It names Carthage's political and legal structures as the models which are transferred to Rome, while the reference to the 'empire' of Carthage anticipates the empire of Rome which will have risen and fallen by the time of the composition of the *Roman d'Eneas*.

The connection between the high status of the queen and the prominence of the city is broken in the return to the Trojans' arrival on the African coast, as we are reminded that the city's walls are incomplete. As in Virgil, Dido's infatuation with Eneas leads her to abandon her civic duties, meaning that work on the physical limits of the city is halted, and the walls are still incomplete when she dies. The French text however has nothing to equate to Dido's deathbed line 'A noble city I have built; my own walls I have seen' (4. 655: 'urbem praeclarum statui, me moenia vidi'). Indeed, the city of the *Roman d'Eneas* seems finally to be compressed into the splendid tomb prepared for Dido's ashes, its

epitaph a testimony to her eminence and her eventual demise. The tomb, which prefigures those of Pallas and Camille, is completed while the city is still under construction, and is a marker of the coexistence of potential and decay. The double meaning of 'ferma' – 'built' and 'completed' – in the description of the relationship between Dido and her city gives a further hint at the irony of this association; the blurred distinction between the process of construction and the finished article implies the transitory nature of political authority rooted in a geographical location. As in the account of the preparations for Camille's funeral, the description of Dido's tomb splits the narrative, establishing a brief but significant dilatory episode outside the central narrative of the Trojans' progress. Dido's death does not hold them back, but we might find an apposite comparison for this splitting in the work of one of Virgil's close contemporaries. Genevieve Liveley's study of Ovid's *Heroides* positions his epistolary poems as 'paraquels', or side narratives, to the myths and narratives from which their 'authors' are drawn.³² Of course, this differs from the funerary episodes of Dido and Camille in the *Roman d'Eneas* insofar as the deceased women are unable to write their own paraquels, but these side narratives have a similarly dilatory effect in relation to the main narrative, privileging commemoration rather than action.

This division is established in the spatial arrangement of the scene of Dido's decision to kill herself. Her first outward look from the high window at the Trojan ships sailing away is a turning point in the ruination of the city. The wall of the city is 'split' by the gaze, which had previously been turned inward to her all-consuming affair with Eneas.³³ The suspension of her personal leadership of the city is an affront to politico-historical narrative, as her neighbouring lords make clear, and her disregard for the ties she had previously cultivated outside her city (which have now soured) means that once the 'spell' is broken she cannot regain her lost honour. With no heirs from her relationships with either Sichaeus or Eneas, she has no opportunity to enter into romance's vertical

³² Liveley, 'Paraquel Lines: Time and Narrative in Ovid's *Heroides*' in *Latin Elegy and Narratology: Fragments of Story* ed. by Genevieve Liveley and Patricia Salzman-Mitchell (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), pp. 86-102. Liveley adopts the term 'paraquel' from Gary Saul Morson.

³³ This expression is adapted from Beatriz Colomina's comparative study of private houses designed by Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier. Colomina's comment on the relationship between subjectivity and the built environment might equally apply to the relationship between the queen and her city, as Dido's no longer being seen by Eneas precedes her absorption into the fabric of the city itself: 'Architecture is not simply a platform that accommodates the viewing subject. It is a viewing mechanism that produces the subject. It precedes and frames its occupant.' Colomina, 'The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism' in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), pp. 73-128 (p.83).

genealogical bonds. The impossibility of political marriage to any of the neighbouring lords whom she had spurned means that she is left without anyone to continue her governance after her death. This does not, however, signal the immediate fall of Carthage in her absence. Where Ovid imagined Dido writing a letter to Aeneas prior to her suicide, an act construed by critics of the *Heroides* as a temporal suspension brought about by the queen herself, the *Eneas* poet inserts a period of civic rather than individual separation from the main narrative, and one which takes gestural rather than scribal form.³⁴ In arguing for the importance of the gestures here I do not mean to downplay the text of Dido's epitaph; rather I wish to draw attention to the non-individuated authorship of the epitaph, which by virtue of its form and context looks backwards in commemorating the occupant of the tomb. The split wall becomes a split moment, making possible future retrospectivity. This may be compared with the complex temporal relations inherent to epistolary writing, as Lavine's later letter to Eneas makes clear. Unlike in the *Aeneid*, the aftermath of Dido's death is implicitly bound up with the fate of Carthage itself, and is not limited to provoking her lover's moral reflections in his own period in the suspended temporal zone of the underworld. The city, faced with the problem of finding a new ruler to oversee its completion, has already been condemned to obsolescence by the medieval narrator, who inserts the sequence of cities whose authority would extend far beyond their limits. The commemoration of the dead queen's life assumes the position of the lover's letter in the *Heroides*, however, and frays the edges of this imperial narrative.

The epitaph's supplementary role in the memorialisation of Dido offers another perspective upon the founder's role in the ongoing history of the city:

.l. espitafe y ot escrit:
 La letre dist que illuec gist
 Dydo qui por amor s'occist;
 Onques ne fu meilleur païene
 S'elle n'eüst amor soutaine,
 Mais elle ama trop follement,
 Savoirs ne li valut neant. (ll. 2223-29)

³⁴ 'The epistolary mode of the *Heroides* points to the possibility of transcending time, of escaping from the confines of the present moment. For just as a letter creates an illusion of spatial connection between writer and addressee by evoking the fantasy of dialogue between them, so it also suggests that the temporal gap between the two may be bridged.' (Liveley, pp. 87-88.)

There was an epitaph written on [the tomb]: its words said that Dido lies here, who killed herself in the name of love. There would never have been a better pagan had she not suddenly fallen in love, but she loved too immoderately, and her wisdom was reduced to nothing.

One of the most obvious observations on this passage is that the epitaph is reported rather than quoted. The implications of this for reading the relationship between monument and city is, however, more complicated. In contrast with texts like the *Roman de Troie*, whose sources are named and repeatedly invoked, or Wace's *Roman de Brut*, in which the author declares where his knowledge of the events described is incomplete, the *Roman d'Eneas*'s author is a less forcefully present force whether as narrator, reader or participant in textual transmission. The last the reader of the *Eneas* hears of Carthage is this description of Dido's tomb. Eneas, unlike Aeneas, does not look back to the city to see the bonfire. The lines which follow the epitaph switch sharply back to the main narrative:

Eneas est en haute mer,
Qui n'a cure de sejourner,
Ne voit terre nulle partie,
Aler en veult en Lombardie. (ll. 2230-33)

Eneas is on the open sea, he has no wish to remain, he can see no land anywhere, he wants to go to Lombardy.

This shift of location from the built landscape of dry land, marked by a text commemorating a dead ruler, to the high seas, where Eneas's desire can be focused on his destination, opens the text to prospective and retrospective reflection. Likewise, in the shift from past to present tense he regains the centre ground from which he can look to the past and the future, referring back to the will of the gods in order to correctly orient himself with regard to his destination. As the poet makes clear, no land but Lombardy will do. Eneas's decisive movement away from Carthage concludes the Dido episode; the past is the prophecy, and the future is its fulfilment, soon to be reinforced by his encounter with Anchises.

The representation of Carthage as a forgotten middle point is reinforced in Eneas's encounter with Dido in the underworld. The Dido of this poem dies not in vengeful fury, as in the *Aeneid*, but in sorrow and misery. In her encounter with Eneas in the

underworld she flees his presence as he seeks to justify his own actions rather than pleading with her to hear him. While Virgil has her look at him in disdain before turning away and running back to her husband who 'responds to her sorrows and gives her love for love' (6. 474: 'respondet curis aequatque Sychaeus amorem'), *Eneas* has her simply unable to bear his words, and she runs to the forest 'ou Sicheüs son sire estoit, / qui en s'amor ot greigneur droit' (ll. 2738-39). This allusion to the 'droit' of Sicheus recalls the episode in which the lords of Libya criticize Dido for forsaking her dead husband, as well as the recurrence of the legal vocabulary of possession throughout the narrative. All in all, this Dido might appear to be cut to fit the confident proclamation of Eneas's 'droit', guaranteed by the gods, but I believe that it is possible to read Dido of Carthage as the embodiment of a city which re-emerges later as an uncomfortable reminder of the contingent nature of pre-eminence.

An apt demonstration of the reproducibility of Carthage is the rapid erection of Eneas's marvellous tent, pitched on the hill before Latium. The city built in stone is the complete opposite of this tent, which appears to be solid, but is unabashedly temporary; while Carthage is entirely stone-built, the tent makes a virtue of beauty rather than durability:

De loing sambloit estre chastel,
A grant merveille par ert bel;
N'ert mie fait por forteresce,
Mais por biauté et por leesce. (ll. 7367-70)

From a distance it looked like a castle, and it was beautiful and wonderful; it was not built for the purpose of defence, but for beauty and delight.

These two structures appear to be at opposite ends of the scale of permanence. Yet there is an uneasiness in this poem's emphasis on Carthage as a new town, with no phase of construction in wood, as is hinted at in its elision of Virgil's comment 'Aeneas marvels at the massive buildings, mere huts once' (1. 421: 'miratur molem Aeneas, magalia quondam'). It seems to have skipped a developmental stage of urbanization, making it appear more like a stage set than a legitimate settlement. This lack of foundation aligns it with the tent, which may be appropriate since they are both locations for agonized love. However, the tent is to be superseded by a permanent colony, constructed with the resources granted by Latinus and Evander which have been won in a fair fight between

two pretenders to the position of Latinus's heir. Furthermore, the end of that phase of Trojan settlement in Italy is the marriage of the knight living in the tent to the princess living in the castle, a legitimizing move which avoids the complicated relationship between guest and host seen in Carthage. The spectral city that came too soon is closed off from the narrative in the same way that Eneas's failed courtship of its queen is seen as a deviation unrelated to the ensuing action, but as the centre of cultural and technological gravity will eventually shift towards Rome, so too will the uncomfortable fact of the obsolescence which will follow it.

Conclusion

Echoing the traditional critical view of the *Aeneid* as a celebration and justification of Augustan authority, it is tempting to regard the *Roman d'Eneas* as a similarly affirmative statement on kingship, especially given its composition during the early years of Henry's rule. As Desmond has demonstrated, the *Aeneid*'s central, canonical position in the education of elites – persisting into the twentieth century – has effectively made it part of the cultural armour of those brought up to lead. The French poem's increased attention to legal terminology bolsters the image of Aeneas/Eneas as a figure whose commanding right to govern can be adapted to suit any period in which his story is retold. Yet the *Roman d'Eneas*'s reappropriation of the narrative of the flight from Troy and foundation of Rome introduces its own temporal and spatial protrusions, troubling the hem of the supposedly monologic imperial garment. In spite of Eneas's frequent reiterations of who he is and where he and his people come from, these disturbances to the very idea of a coherent point of origin demonstrate the poem's manipulation of what might otherwise appear to be a confident statement of a national quest, endorsed by the divine. The tensions arising from the interpretation of objects are reminders of the ambivalent legacy of Troy, and, while more subtle, their role in reshaping the narrative into which they are woven is perhaps comparable with the 'irrational' psychological counter-current Sarah Spence argues is provided by Juno in the *Aeneid*.³⁵ The material and gestural

³⁵ 'Juno is meant not as the negative personification of the irrational but rather as the embodiment of all that is oppressed in a humanist world.' Sarah Spence, *Rhetorics of Reason and Desire: Vergil, Augustine, and the Troubadours* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 23.

disturbances to the temporal movement of the main narrative do not entirely derail it, but are nevertheless a complicating factor in the transfer of power from one site to another. They also call into question the relationship between empire and time; obtrusive episodes like the burial scenes indicate that the building of an empire implies a harmonization of the regions which are to come under Roman control with what we might call 'Trojan/Roman Mean Time', while the resulting monuments still maintain a form of resistance to it. The *Roman d'Eneas* transforms Eneas's realm, 'la latine terre', into *langue romane*, underlining the verbal and performative dimensions of imperial myth-making. While the comments cited at the beginning of this chapter on the value of involucre as a means to self knowledge preface the author's own commentary on Virgil's work, we might also see the covering narrative as both a hiding place and a limited entity from under which unflattering or uncomfortable truths may spill. Like the obstinately ill-fitting cloak of 'Du Mantel mautaillié', this vernacular re-clothing of an old story is not designed to be a smooth fit.

Chapter 2

Man writes, God speaks: authorship and troubled paternity in the *Vie de sainte Christine*

'Trop iez,' fait il, 'hardie quant tu ainsi paroles
A celui qui ta vie a escrite en sa main!' (ll. 1796-97)

He said 'You are too bold when you speak like this to the one who has written
your life in his own hand!'¹

In both the era in which it was composed and the modern period of scholarly interest in the work of Gautier de Coinci, his *Vie de sainte Christine* (c.1220) is a text almost completely overshadowed by his monumental *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. The *Vie de sainte Christine* survives in only two manuscripts, in comparison with the 114 manuscripts preserving some or all of the miracle stories (one of which also contains the *Vie de sainte Christine*).² In spite of the high regard enjoyed by Gautier's collection of Marian tales, his life of the virgin martyr has been largely overlooked. Tony Hunt's recent study of Gautier's language and poetics devotes a single footnote to *Christine*, giving no more detail than the likely date of composition and bibliographic references for the manuscripts and print editions.³ Brigitte Cazelles' earlier study of weakness and physical frailty as indicators of spiritual superiority in Gautier's writing does not mention *Christine* at all, in spite of the poem's clear interest in this theme.⁴ It seems, in fact, that for contemporary critics 'Gautier de Coinci' is almost entirely synonymous with the *Miracles*. This chapter draws attention to this under-valued text with an analysis of Gautier's contrasting representations of verbal and written communications, and will use these to explore the limits of the paternal and genealogical narratives drawn up by Urban and his

¹ All quotations are from Gautier de Coinci, *La Vie de sainte Cristine*, ed. Olivier Collet, Textes littéraires français (Geneva: Droz, 1999); translations into English are my own.

² While Gautier's reference to the 'sainte Cristine, / Dont rimoiai l'autr'an l'istoire' (1 *Miracles* 11, l. 2240) in his major work has been taken as implying that the saint's life pre-dates the *Miracles*, Masami Okubo argues that the text in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 817 (eastern France, dated 1465 by the scribe, Margaret de Chauvigny) – the version upon which this edition is based, and which is 650 lines longer than the other extant version, Carpentras, Bibliothèque Inguimbertaine 106 (Northern France, last quarter of the thirteenth century) – is a late revision of the poem by Gautier himself. Okubo, 'A propos de la *Vie de sainte Cristine* de Gautier de Coinci', *Romania*, 121 (2003), 248-64. All quotations from the *Miracles Nostre Dame* are taken from Koenig's edition (4 volumes).

³ Tony Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes: The Writing of Gautier de Coinci*. Gallica (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), p. 7.

⁴ Cazelles, *La Faiblesse chez Gautier de Coinci*. Stanford French and Italian Studies (Stanford: Anima Libri, 1978).

substitutes. Gautier's location at the intersection of pious and profane genres may also be indicated by the allusions to incest, a theme of some of the best-known narratives of the period, including those of Apollonius of Tyre and St Gregory. The saint's father's voicing of his authority through his claim to have 'written her life in his own hand' is belied by Christina's status as a gift from God, and Gautier's emphasis on vocal performance and visual spectacle throughout the text enhances this sense of the privileged voice of the divine. Urban's use of writing as a means for denoting an idealized relationship of subservience is at odds with the more vehicular nature of writing implicit in Gautier's prologue, where he argues that writing must be continually disinterred and its *sens* re-presented to new audiences. I examine how the relationships between the saint and her parents are reconfigured as successive authority figures are 'written out' of the narrative by Gautier. Finally, I draw a comparison between different notions of heaven to demonstrate how Gautier plays with ideas of narrative closure through the design and re-appropriations of a particular place within Urban's domain: the tower.

1. Gautier, Christina, and genre

The sources for this poem, which the author locates in Lombardy in an unspecified period, are murky, and the 'Christina of Tyre' of Gautier's narrative is most likely to be a conflation of eastern and western hagiographic figures and conventions. Olivier Collet's critical glossary to the works of Gautier argues that there is not and has never been been a settlement named Tyre in Lombardy, and sees this anachronism as a result of the hybrid nature of this particular legend.⁵ Similarly, although *Butler's Lives of the Saints* claims that her martyrdom took place during the persecutions of Diocletian in a city named Tyro, which has since been swallowed by the waters of Lake Bolsena in Tuscany, it seems more likely that the story results from a conflation of two virgin martyrs, Christina of Bolsena and (the probably fictitious) Christina of Tyre. The erroneous claim for Tyre being in Italy is also made later in the thirteenth century in Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*. Christine de Pisan's account of Christina's martyrdom in her *Livre de la cité des dames* (1405) names the saint's home as 'la cité de Tir' (book 3, chapter 10), but gives no further geographical information. There is no reference to any place which might correspond to

⁵ Olivier Collet, *Glossaire et index critiques des oeuvres d'attribution certaine de Gautier de Coinci*, Publications romanes et françaises (Geneva: Droz, 2000), p. 584.

the Tyre in Lombardy described by Gautier in J. G. Graesse's survey of Latin place-names.⁶ David Farmer suggests that the legend is a conflation of the lives of Barbara, Catherine of Alexandria and Ursula, whose legends are also of dubious origin.⁷ While early versions of the life of Christina develop in the eastern and western Mediterranean by the tenth century, the two strands differ in locating the place of the saint's birth: in western versions she is claimed to be from Persia, while in the east she is thought to be from Phoenicia. Because of the considerable uncertainty surrounding her life, Christina was removed from the Roman Calendar of Saints in 1969.

It is likely that the *Vie de sainte Christine* was modelled upon the legends of other virgin martyrs; the most obvious example is that of St Barbara, who, like Gautier's Christina, refuses to worship the idols of her father and is enclosed in a tower to preserve her virtue at the same time as protecting her from the influence of Christianity. Like St Catherine, Christina too is tortured on a wheel. Christina refuses all the offers of marriage she receives from visiting suitors, saying she prefers to wait for her true husband; her father, Urban, is delighted, interpreting this as a vow of chastity and endorsement of his faith. Distressed at her father's forcing her to worship the idols made from precious metals he has placed in her tower, Christina destroys the lavish decoration of the temple, and throws the idols to the ground, distributing their broken pieces among the poor of Tyre under cover of darkness. When Urban sees what she has done she confesses her Christian faith to him, and he subsequently tortures her to try to make her recant, but his efforts rebound on his guards who are maimed or killed, and the miraculous spectacle of Christina's endurance prompts the conversion of many of his subjects. Urban suddenly dies, and his role is taken over first by Dion, then by Julien, representatives of the emperor in Rome, but they too fail, and a growing number of the citizens of Tyre convert to Christianity. Christina is eventually beheaded, but not before an unearthly voice is heard to proclaim her as pure, saintly and ready to die. As the story of her miracles and martyrdom spread out across Italy, many more people convert to her faith.

In spite of this tangled history, the blurring of distinctions between eastern and western narratives offers a useful point of entry to the text. Gautier makes numerous references

⁶ *Orbis latinus Online* <<http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/cul/resolve?ATH2526>> [accessed 19th September 2012]

⁷ Farmer, *Dictionary of Saints*, fifth edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 104.

to the written source of his narrative, claiming that it is taken from a text in the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Médard at Soissons, a wealthy community founded in the sixth century by Clotaire I; in this claim, he may be using the context as well as the content of the life to bolster its pious credentials and enhance his own reputation.⁸ His tentative statement 'De latin en romanz la translat si je puis' (l. 29) places him between two literary languages, as the act of translation from Latin to a romance language localizes the text as he makes it available to a non-clerical audience. However, the dispersal of the library at Saint-Médard and loss of its records means that it would be difficult to determine which texts Gautier was working from; in her introduction to translated excerpts from Gautier's *Christine*, Cazelles echoes the claim made by Andreas Ott, the first modern editor of the text, that the 'livre' Gautier refers to as his source (l. 27) may in fact be a range of different Latin *vitae*.⁹ Translation of the text is, Gautier hopes, a tool for the promotion of the cult of the martyr, but we might also infer a redemptive gesture towards the tongue of the jongleurs, whose subject matter and audience he derides in his opening lines:

Mieuz aiment a oïr ce que l'ame compere,
Si com Renart traï Ysengrin son compere
Ou une grant oiseuse, s'un menestrier leur dit,
Que de saint ne de sainte essample ne bon dit. (ll. 9-12)

[People] prefer to hear things that amuse the soul, such as how Renart betrayed his friend Isengrin, or a silly tale told by a jongleur, [rather] than the examples of holy men and women, or any good word.

In this disdainful comment on those who prefer less edifying narratives, Gautier makes his case for the responsibilities of writers and communicators.¹⁰ The use of 'essample' in the lines above marks Gautier's hagiographic territory, as it anticipates the evidence he gives for his text's authenticating links to the real world. It recalls the prologue's opening, in

⁸ In the previous century Saint-Médard had been the target of Guibert of Nogent's *De pignoribus sanctorum*, a treatise condemning the practice of relic veneration; the abbey claimed to possess Jesus's milk-tooth. See *Self and Society in Medieval France: the Memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent*, ed. with introduction by John F. Benton (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 28-29.

⁹ Brigitte Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), pp. 138-39.

¹⁰ Gautier's apparent disregard for these works is complicated by their influence on his *Miracles*, which are frequently preserved in manuscripts alongside the profane tales he alludes to in this preface; see Brian J. Levy, 'Or escoutez une merveille! Parallel Paths: Gautier de Coinci and the Fabliaux', in *Gautier de Coinci: Miracles, Music, and Manuscripts*, ed. by Kathy M. Krause and Alison Stones, *Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 331-43.

which the wisdom of Solomon is conveyed through scripture. However, Gautier then insists that bad examples should not be repeated or taught to others: ‘Qui set nul bon essample ne s’en doit ja retraire / Volentiers ne le doie enseigner et retraire’ (ll. 3-4). The faithlessness embodied in the use of language for pleasure and amusement with no instructive element is, for Gautier, a dereliction of duty, and Renart’s betrayals are replicated by authors who deviate from truthful subjects. His attention to the power of speech and piety of subject-matter rather than the artistry of the composer is further evidenced in his call to Christina to intercede with God so that he may be assured of the forgiveness of his sins and give a truthful account of her holy body (ll. 36-40). Specifically, it is the voice of the saint which will justify his efforts and his eventual reward for them.

The epilogue makes clear the duty of the Christian, through prayer and remembrance, to turn his or her attention to the timeless space beyond death, whose unimaginable proportions and quantities differentiate it from the materialist devotions of the poem’s non-Christians. Throughout the text the references to God speaking through the saint and, by association, the hagiographer, are reminders of the duty to speak in praise of God and to inspire others to do the same. His crediting with power of both the written and the spoken word is made clear in another reference early on in the text to Biblical authority – ‘en Sainte Escripiture sovent *ai oï dire...*’ (l. 18) – which is followed by an acknowledgement of the wisdom contained in the books he reads:

C’est tresor enterrez qui jamaiz n’est seüz
 Bien fait qui son engieng a bon estude livre,
 Car molt fuissons rudes si ne fussent li livre
 Ou mistrent nostre ancesstre grant estude et grant paine. (ll. 20-23)

It is buried treasure which is never known; he does well who devotes his intellect to proper study, for we would be ignorant if it were not for the books which our predecessors painstakingly filled with their studies.

The particular location of the ‘treasure’ is significant in light of the relationship between high and low places, as I will discuss later in this chapter. That which is underground is especially distant from heaven, and it can only be redeemed through being read and reinterpreted. This appears to privilege knowledge gained from reading, but in Gautier’s attention to the power of oral communication and visual performance in this text we might discern a subtle coda to his exuberantly musical *Miracles*. This particular

dimension of the *Miracles* has been widely studied, as many of the manuscripts include musical notation.¹¹ Gautier is clearly interested in the diverse means for expressing praise and recording experience, but this concern with modes of transmission is also apparent in the *Vie de sainte Christine*, and is an important element in his use of hagiography as exploration of authority and hierarchy. The vernacular brings pious subject matter comes into contact with works from a varied range of genres and registers, and though Gautier appears to disdain all but the most devout literature, the allusions in this text hint at the generic disturbances arising from the juxtaposition of saints' lives with other material in medieval manuscripts.¹²

2. The father as author

Ce raconte l'histoire qui molt est ancienne,
 Au tans qu'autorizier volt Dieu foi crestienne
 Et fist fructifier Sainte Eglise et florir
 Por les diverses sectes effacier et morir,
 A Tyr en Lombardie, une noble cité,
 Ung sarrazin avoit de grant nobilité. (ll. 53-8)

This is what is said in the story which is very old; in the time when God wanted to establish the Christian faith and make the Holy Church bloom and grow in order to kill off other sects, there was, in the noble city of Tyre in Lombardy, a Saracen of great nobility.

The 'once upon a time' opening to the narrative of the life of the saint clearly the authoritative precedent to which the poet defers; alternatively, it establishes a suitably deferential tone. This is in marked contrast to Urban's paternal claim to personal authorship of Christina, cited at the opening of this chapter. Urban, an important official close to the Roman emperor, is the first and most important of Christina's three

¹¹ See, for example, essays in Kathy M. Krause and Alison Stones (eds), *Gautier de Coinci: Miracles, Music and Manuscripts*, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe, 13 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).

¹² As Gaunt comments on the *Vie de Saint Grégoire*: 'The text's 'horizon of expectations' is initially that of hagiography, but the central section of the text makes little sense without a knowledge of romance. Given the adoption of the vernacular it is probable that the text was intended for readers and listeners who know romance and therefore that the message of the prologue, which initially appeared to be simply 'anyone of you can commit this sin, but then be forgiven' may subsequently be glossed as 'anyone who is taken in by the fictions of romance may commit this sin'.' (*Gender and Genre*, p. 209).

tormentors. Urban is a model of anti-Christian villainy, delighting in torturing and killing those who defy his faith and fail to bow to his gods. Furthermore, the period in which he lives is presented as one in which the Christian church is still not securely established, though as Gautier's narration makes clear it is God's will that 'diverses sectes' should be stamped out. This comment is significant in two distinct ways. First, this organic model for the rise to dominance of a particular faith group contrasts with the notion of *translatio imperii* expressed in texts such as the *Roman d'Eneas*, wherein the centre of political power shifts continually from one place to another. Gautier's image of the church as a flourishing plant which chokes out the weaker 'sectes' replaces transient secular authority with the inevitable – because God-willed – outward growth of the Christian faith in the form of the univocal 'Sainte Eglise'. This is reinforced in the similarly organic terms in Gautier's first gloss on Christina's name:

Bien dut croistre par li sainte crestienté,
 Car du non Jhesucrist fu le sien non enté.
 Molt reprint bien et crut et frutefia l'ente,
 C'onques de Dieu servir a nul jor ne fu lente. (ll. 125-28)

It was only right that holy Christianity should flourish in her, for her own name was grafted onto the name of Jesus Christ. The graft grew and blossomed in goodness, and was always eager to serve God.

The second subtext to this comment is illuminated by the historical context. Gautier is working with centuries-old material and contributing to a genre already well-established in the Latin literary tradition, but his audience lives in the period of the suppression of heretical groups in southern France and the far-reaching and prescriptive reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. While the 'diverses sectes' he refers to here can be understood as the pre-Christian faiths of Italian late antiquity, they can also be interpreted as ciphers for the perceived threats to Christian orthodoxy in the author's own lifetime. Furthermore, this same audience has already been described by this author as having a taste for the sensational and scurrilous; if not quite heretical, they do appear prone to the kind of impiety Gautier claims to disdain.

Gautier's vagueness regarding groups opposed to the Christian church has important consequences for how we are to interpret the figure of Urban, and it also affects how medieval readers may view their own non-Christian contemporaries. Urban may be read

as a compilation of 'othernesses' in relation to both his daughter and the Christian audience of the life. He is initially introduced as 'sarrazin', but in the rest of the narrative he is identified as a 'païen' who venerates idols bearing such typical classical names as Apollo, Jupiter and Venus. However, he also repeatedly names 'Mahon' as one of his gods, and Christine denounces the faith of her father and the emperor as 'mahomerie' (l. 774). This melange of antique and Islamic reference points is not uncommon in western European medieval literature, nor is it restricted to overtly religious works. The Saracens of the *chansons de geste* and the literature of the crusades frequently appear more as an assortment of stereotypical villains than as an accurate reflection of Muslim practices and beliefs, particularly in their reputed polytheism.¹³ John Tolan argues that 'this portrayal of Saracen idolatry [in the twelfth century] grows out of a propagandistic effort to justify and glorify the actions of the first and second Crusades.'¹⁴ While the Crusades may provide thirteenth-century writers with a useful rhetorical dividing line between Christianity and her enemies, the increasingly ugly reputation of crusader activity (particularly in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade) seriously troubles the definition of 'Christian'. It is for this reason that Gautier inflects Urban with another category of difference which also recurs frequently in his collection of Marian miracles, namely Judaism.¹⁵ Gautier's comparison is implied rather than openly stated in *Christina*, but in the context of anti-Jewish sentiment in thirteenth-century popular culture, this allusion adds a provocative dimension to his narrative of good versus evil.

Gautier incorporates a more obvious condemnation of non-Christians by having Urban refer to Christ as 'celui que li juiz pendirent' (l. 163), or some similar variation. This is, on a superficial level, a slur on both Judaism (for the perceived barbarism of its adherents) and Christianity (for God's seeming inability to protect himself from this barbarity); Gautier manipulates Urban's discourse of difference to have him represent himself as an enemy of Christianity at the same time as working into the narrative an anti-Jewish

¹³ Sharon Kinoshita's reading of the *Chanson de Roland*, however, sees the poem as a more complex representation of the encounters between Franks and Saracens, and she argues that its 'surprising histories of accomodationism and exchange [bring] into focus the fluidity characterizing medieval notions of difference.' *Medieval Boundaries*, p. 45.

¹⁴ John Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p.106. Tolan disputes Norman Daniel's earlier reading of the representation of Saracens as pagans as a matter of literary convention rather than pro-Christian propaganda. Daniel, *The Arabs and Mediaeval Europe* (London: Longman, 1975), pp. 235-7.

¹⁵ Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), pp. 228-36.

calumny with which the Christian audience might be expected to agree.¹⁶ In this, we might see an echo of the increasing tendencies of Christian thinkers of previous centuries to disregard distinctions between non-Christian groups. Jeremy Cohen locates this shift in the thought of Anselm of Canterbury; Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* recasts the role of the Jews, downgrading their traditionally privileged status as witnesses to the Old Testament by elevating rational debate over literal reading of Scripture:

He construed Judaism as exemplifying a primitive theological mind-set, representative of an inability to grasp the logic of Christianity, appropriately and necessarily surpassed by faith in Christ. One can thus understand Anselm's failure to distinguish sharply between his Jews, his pagans, and his infidels; he really had no need to do so.¹⁷

Meanwhile, the soon-to-be-overthrown father with his 'fol creance' is structurally analogous to conventional perceptions of the place of the Jews in Christian destiny, derived from Augustine but subject to revision in the context of hardening sentiment towards Jewish practices – presumed and actual – in the thirteenth century.¹⁸ I do not wish to suggest that this text is systematically anti-Jewish; however, this undercurrent is important for understanding how Gautier constructs a somewhat ambiguous 'other' which is recognizable to a lay audience lacking first-hand knowledge of either polytheism or Islam, in the context of subject matter nearly a thousand years old.

Another potentially troubling aspect of Urban's character is the tyrannical control he exercises over Christina. Yet were it not for the fact that he is anti-Christian (and therefore inherently corrupt) a thirteenth-century audience might be tempted to sympathize with him, viewing him as the protective father he believes himself to be.¹⁹ His defence of her decision to preserve her chastity in the face of her would-be suitors would certainly chime with contemporary ideas of feminine virtue.²⁰ However, his obsessive

¹⁶ On how Christian and Jewish writers represented one another in line with pre-existing ideological frameworks in this period see Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trs. Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 134-204.

¹⁷ Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley, California, and London: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 178-79.

¹⁸ Jeremy Cohen, pp. 333-34.

¹⁹ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne notes a similar representation of an ambiguously sympathetic father figure in the legends of Juliana, another virgin martyr of the early church. Wogan-Browne, 'Saints' Lives and the Female Reader', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 27. 4 (1991), 314-32 (319).

²⁰ On the medieval context to this see Diane Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1983).

policing of Christina's conduct and demonstrative physical shows of affection for her might also hint towards a quasi-incestuous relationship. While Gautier's poem is not strictly an example of the narrative trope Elizabeth Archibald identifies as the 'flight from the incestuous father', these are clear points of comparison. Archibald makes clear that incidences of incest in medieval narratives involving people who become saints are most frequently used as opportunities to demonstrate the potential for redemption, with many people who commit this most serious of sins – knowingly or unknowingly – achieving exemplary status.²¹ One of the best-known examples of this is the popular legend of St Gregory, born from an incestuous liaison between his mother and her brother. Gregory is abandoned as a baby, and later unwittingly marries his mother; when he and she discover their true relationship, they separate to do lengthy penance, and while the mother becomes a nun, Gregory eventually becomes pope.²² Archibald makes the general point that while cases of mother-son incest are most commonly found in moralizing tales and *exempla*, father-daughter incest appears most frequently as an incident in a larger narrative.²³

To illustrate this incestuous dimension, a fruitful comparison could be drawn between Gautier's *Vie de sainte Cristine* and the remarkably durable late antique narrative of Apollonius of Tyre. There are several allusions to the *Historia Apollonii*, which was widely circulated in Latin and various vernaculars throughout the medieval and early modern periods, in French writing of the early thirteenth century.²⁴ Apollonius, a young prince, seeks to marry Tarsia, daughter of the king Antiochus, but when the prince solves the king's riddle and realizes that he has a sexual relationship with his daughter he flees the city in fear of his life, and spends many years travelling around the eastern Mediterranean before being reunited with Tarsia after her father's death. Although there is only one surviving fragment of the Old French version of the *Historia Apollonii*, the narrative appears to have been well known to medieval writers and audiences, if not universally well regarded.²⁵ The anonymous author of the *Poème moral* refers to the tale of

²¹ Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 111.

²² On St Gregory see also Emma Campbell, *Medieval Saints' Lives: The Gift, Kinship and Community in Old French Literature*, Gallica (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 85-88; Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 209.

²³ Archibald, *Incest*, pp. 145-91.

²⁴ Elizabeth Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991).

²⁵ Alfred Schulze, 'Ein Bruchstück des altfranzösischen Apolloniusromanes', *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 33 (1909), 226-9.

Apollonius at the end of his work in a similarly disapproving way to Gautier's reference to the stories of Renart:

Mais miez vos vient oïr nostre petit sermon
 Ke les vers d'Apollone u d'Aien d'Avinion;
 Laissiez altrui oïr les beaz vers de Fulcon
 Et ceaz qui ne sunt fait se de vaniteit non. (*Poème moral*, ll. 2309-12)

But it is better for you to hear our little sermon than the verses about Apollonius or Aye d'Avignon; leave it to others to hear the lovely story of Fulke, and those which are merely made of vanity.²⁶

It would be too great a conjecture to claim kinship between the long-lived Apollonius legend and Gautier's life of Christina on the basis of their claims to places named Tyre, especially since the Tyre of Gautier's text is clearly not Apollonius' birthplace. Nevertheless, a comparison of these two narratives highlights a certain prurient exoticism, echoed in the simultaneous disapproval and enjoyment hinted at in the *Poème moral's* comment on the 'beaz vers de Fulcon', by raising the spectre of the incestuous pagan father.²⁷ While Urban does not act out any illicit desire he may have for his daughter, he could still be read as wishing to occupy an all-powerful masculine position in relation to her. A further comparison may be made with Slavoj Žižek's analysis of a contemporary *Urvater*, Josef Fritzl. Žižek's interpretation of Fritzl's defence of his actions involves an amplification of the paternal role to the point of absolute tyranny:

What makes his reign so chilling is precisely the way his brutal exercise of power and his *usufruit* of the daughter were not just cold acts of exploitation, but were accompanied by an ideologico-familial justification (he was simply doing what a father should do, namely protecting his children from drugs and other dangers of the outside world), as well as by occasional displays of compassion and human consideration (he did take the sick daughter to hospital, etc.). These acts were not chinks of warm humanity in his armour of coldness and cruelty, but parts of the same protective attitude that made him imprison and violate his children.²⁸

²⁶ Cited by Archibald, *Apollonius*, p. 225.

²⁷ Archibald comments on the durability of this particular element of the Apollonius narrative: 'It is striking that every extended narrative version of the story includes to opening episode of Antiochus and his daughter, however briefly. [...] Whether or not they traced in detail the pattern by which the theme of father-daughter relationships is repeated again and again, medieval adaptors clearly thought the incest opening very important in this family romance. [...] Antiochus, Archistrates, Apollonius, and their respective daughters are all necessary, contrasting and complementing each other's roles. We should not assume that the opening incest scene is there by mistake.' (*Apollonius*, pp. 98-99).

²⁸ Slavoj Žižek, 'My Own Private Austria', preface to *The Plague of Fantasies* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), p. vii.

Urban's concern for his daughter involves preventing her from hearing about and potentially being converted by Christians. This is distinct from the motives of fathers in other literary genres – romances, *fabliaux*, *chansons de toile* – who enclose their beautiful daughters (and they are invariably beautiful) in towers to protect them from the amorous attentions of other men.²⁹ The tower detail also strengthens the case for viewing the life of St Barbara as one of the influences of Gautier's text; like Christina, Barbara subverts her imprisonment by worshipping God at her window. However, these fathers and Urban are linked with Žižek's example through the wish to avoid corruption, a point reinforced by Urban's joy at Christina's stated desire to preserve her virginity, even though he does not understand the terms in which she articulates this wish. It becomes clear that, in Urban's view, rejection of his faith is tantamount to rejection of him as a father, and both are deeply reprehensible. In this schema, the father expects to take a place alongside the gods in what he imagines is Christina's pantheon. Indeed, he interprets her refusal to bow to his gods as a criticism of his efforts, and he orders that the idols be remade even more lavishly, failing to recognize the irony in his promise to the saint that he will be an exemplary maker of gods:

'Por t'amor, bele fille, merveillez volrai faire,
Car tant i ferai metre et fin or et argent
C'onques si richez dieux fait ne furent par gentz.' (ll. 670-72)

'For the love of you, my beautiful daughter, I want to work wonders, so I will have them made in such fine gold and silver that no more lavish gods will ever have been made by human hands.'

Urban and the companions in the tower try on several occasions to induce her to bow to the pagan gods by reminding her that she owes her beauty and other virtues, as well as her miraculous survival without food or water, to them. This too is ironic, and underlines the impression of Urban as a fool, since while he is correct to attribute these great works to divine power he fails to identify correctly the god responsible. The gods could even be said to be interchangeable with the father and the other persecutors who take his place

²⁹ It may also reflect on the desire of rulers to consolidate power by avoiding the political complications arising from the marriages of their daughters. Rosamond McKitterick suggests this as an alternative explanation for Charlemagne's refusal to have his daughters married, a decision Einhard claims he made because he loved them too much to be able to let them go. See McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 88-96.

following his death, as they are as impotent as each other. Dion and Julien in turn become surrogate father-figures, but they all ultimately fail to curtail the rebellious daughter's desires.

In spite of the evidence for Urban's status as transgressive figure at the level of religious conviction, however, the true transgressor in this network of associations is Christina herself. She identifies God as both her father and her husband, and is thus able to fulfil the desire for a form of kinship that Urban can only fantasize about, since, as Emma Campbell argues in her reading of the text, 'for the saint, kinship between life and death involves a liminal relationship to human kinship and desire that translates into an affirmation of troubled filiation both at and beyond that limit.'³⁰ Far from being a horrific prospect, Christina's contemplation of marriage to her father draws on the special status of the Virgin's relationship with the Holy Trinity.³¹ Indeed, as Campbell suggests, the representation of Christina's relationship with Urban might even be viewed as a parody of her relationship with God.³² Similarly, Barbara Newman draws on visual representations of the Trinity and the divine family of the Virgin to argue that in this special case 'the incest taboo is not so much transgressed as transvalued, upheld in one sense even as it is overturned in another'.³³ Christina's simultaneous rejection of marriage and thwarting of her father's intentions are necessary to her dedication to God, creating the conditions for a new model of kinship.³⁴ Through the allusion to this tradition, Christina can effectively traverse the boundary between licit and illicit relations in a way Urban cannot.

We might see another hint at the ability of Christina to transgress thresholds of acceptable contact between fathers and children in a gruesome episode in the early stages of her torture. Frustrated by her disobedience, Urban has Christina stripped naked, hung by her hair and beaten until her torn flesh hangs off her body. When he proclaims that this is a test of the strength of her god, she rips a piece of her flesh away from her side, and throws it in his face, telling him to eat it: 'Chien, menjue la char qu'ai

³⁰ Campbell, *Medieval Saints' Lives*, p. 94.

³¹ Archibald, *Incest*, pp. 238-43.

³² Campbell, p. 91.

³³ Barbara Newman, 'Intimate Pieties: Holy Trinity and Holy Family in the Late Middle Ages', *Religion and Literature* 31.1 (1999), 77-101 (p. 78).

³⁴ Gaunt employs the terms of Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology to explain the value – and socially disruptive potential – of female virginity: 'Virginity when guaranteed by a man determines the value of a woman; when chosen by a woman it constitutes a threat to social order.' (*Gender and Genre*, p. 200).

devant toi jetee, / Ele est or en bon point, tu l'as assez betee!' (ll. 1519-20: 'Dog, eat the meat that I've thrown at you, it's nice and tender from all your beating!'). While this type of culinary joke is not uncommon in martyr lives, reminiscent as it is of St Lawrence's call to his tormentors to turn him over in the fire because he's well-done on one side, it also recalls the terms of Antiochus's riddle. The puzzle Apollonius must interpret includes the phrase 'I eat my mother's flesh' (4. 7-8: 'maternam carnem vescor'), introducing the notion of bodily consumption as an element of incest. If Gautier had this riddle in mind when writing the scene of Christina inviting her father to literally eat her body, we might read her words as a taunt by someone who will shortly have all she desires directed at someone who will shortly be destroyed by his desire to maintain his faith in the face of Christina's miracles.

It may also be possible to trace a connection between Antiochus's riddle and Christina's evasive verbal strategies for preventing her father's detection of her conversion. In both of these cases language becomes a defensive tool for preventing the marriage of a young woman. The riddle's solution provokes horror, while Urban is enraged when he eventually discovers what Christina meant when she said:

'Pere,' fait la pucele, 'ne vous en vueil mentir,
Mon voloir si est tel, et mon cuer le propose,
Que le Roi amerai qui des rois est la rose
Et tant est beau qu'il n'est si bele rien nezune.
De beauté vaint et passe le soleil et la lune.
Mon cuer entierement sanz mentir s'i marie.' (ll. 334-39)

'Father,' said the girl, 'I do not want to lie to you, my wish is such, and my heart speaks it, that I will love the King who is the rose among all kings, and whose beauty is unequalled. In his beauty he exceeds the sun and the moon. Without lying, I marry him with my whole heart.'

Urban is overjoyed at first, as he takes her words to mean that she is devoting herself to his gods. It is significant that she repeats here and elsewhere that she does not wish to lie to him, as she is the figure with whom the audience is expected to identify; as a good Christian, she cannot be untruthful, but she is still able to deceive her father through describing rather than naming her ideal husband.³⁵ While the audience can grasp

³⁵ Another potential analogy here could be with Lavine in the *Roman d'Eneas*, who informs her mother that she is in love while deferring for as long as possible naming the object of her love.

immediately what this speech means, they are also invited to marvel at Urban's blindness, reinforcing his status as both tyrant and fool. The misunderstanding between father and daughter is amplified, as in their later discussions Urban advises her to honour all of the gods, not just one. Rather than creating a point of agreement between father and daughter on her vow of chastity, Christina's explanation creates a narrative space of ambiguity within the place of worship Urban has designed for her. Christina replies that he is correct, and that she upholds the Holy Trinity, a concept which allows for a further demonstration of Urban's ignorance:

Urban ne set que dire, car la soutilité
 Ne puet savoir n'entendre de Sainte Trinité,
 Ains cuide qu'ele vueille par sa simplece croire
 En trois des dieux sans plus et avoir en memmoire. (ll. 731-4)

Urban did not know what to say, for he can't know or understand the subtlety of the Holy Trinity, but thinks that she, in her ignorance, wants to believe in and commemorate only three of his gods.

Urban's perception of deficiency in his daughter's understanding is, ironically, proof of his own shortcoming. This game continues past the test of Christina's dedication to the pagan gods and even beyond Urban's death. The miracles associated with the saint are accepted as the work of God by the majority of the witnesses but condemned as deception or, worse, the work of the devil by Dion and Julien, the officials sent from Rome to deal with this rebellion against the order of the empire. They attempt to woo Christina back to the faith of her ancestors by suggesting to her that if she renounces her new religion she could marry any man she chooses, even the emperor himself. By posing as marriage brokers they create for themselves a form of paternal relation to the girl. However, this leaves them in exactly the same position as Urban; their misinterpretation of events means that they are unable to prevent a marriage of a nature entirely alien to them, and whose benefits are not material but spiritual.

In sum, then, Urban and the other father substitutes are characterized by their unwillingness and/or inability to accept what is plainly obvious to the other witnesses to Christina's passion, and to the audience of the text. They fail to bring about either her conformity or humiliating death, and their materialist values, which assign them to any one of the three categories of dangerous outsider described above, are thoroughly

dismissed in the martyr's spectacular disregard for her own body. Christina's own triumph is her 'honest deception' and subsequent submission to the will of her father/husband/god. In this scheme, the father, and the value of biological filiation for which he stands, is eliminated in the willing submission to martyrdom which restores the saint to her true position. Recalling Žižek's discussion of the nature of the paternal relation as something which is always potentially horrifying, we might conclude that Christina does not seek to escape the law of the father. On the contrary, she embraces it, but this involves a reconceptualization of the category of 'father' in 'a dimension which, under 'normal' circumstances, remains virtual, [and which] was actualized in the Fritzl case.'³⁶

3. Sainthood identity: Christina re-draws the edges

'Assez puet mal souffrir, assez puet honte boire,
Bien pert qu'il n'a en li sens, raison ne memoire.' (ll. 3665-6)

'She can take enough suffering and drink enough shame, it's clear that she has no sense, reason or memory.'

Julien's pronouncement to his lords about Christina's loss of her faculties provides a telling insight into Gautier's notion of the differences between how the Christians and anti-Christians of this text structure their past to understand their present condition. For the Roman official, the 'fol creance' which has supplanted all other mental activity is both symptom and proof of the inherent senselessness of Christianity. His and his co-religionists' preference for practices leading to tangible rewards connects their present devotional sacrifices with past and future good fortune. Christina's defiance of this orthodoxy not only marks her defiance of the will of her father and the emperor; it signifies the total rejection of the principles underlying the structures whereby they attain and maintain their authority. The logic they apply to justify their practices holds that the favour the gods show them is a result of their and their ancestors' devotion, and that to maintain the benefits of wealth, power and plentiful harvests they must continue to worship in the same manner as those forefathers. Christina is thus a rebel against both the authority of her own father and paternal authority in general. It is for this reason

³⁶ Žižek, 'My Own Private Austria', p. ix. See also Campbell, *Medieval Saints' Lives*, pp. 92-95.

that she is dismissed as an exile from reason itself. Divorced from what they can conceive of as just faith, she is placed outside the law and classed as a deviant with no means of relating to time or place as they are experienced by other figures, who define themselves as imperial heirs.

Christina's relationship to past and future is not, however, reducible to these terms. She is, as Gautier makes clear, a gift from God, and her realization of her true inheritance and devout adherence to God re-defines filiation. In this, she seems to occupy a position somewhere between Giorgio Agamben's notion of the *homo sacer*, or sacred man, and the central character of Herman Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener', as interpreted by Žižek. 'Homo sacer', or sacred man, the marginalized individual who can be killed but not sacrificed or murdered, is exemplified for Agamben in the power of death Roman fathers exercised over their sons.³⁷ This offers an apposite comparison with Christina's situation, as the death her father and his substitutes work so hard to bring about is intended to secure the late Roman state from the corrupting influence brought into it by 'one of their own':

Once brought back to his proper place beyond both penal law and sacrifice, *homo sacer* presents the originary figure of life taken into the sovereign ban and preserves the memory of the originary exclusion through which the political dimension was first constituted. [...] The sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life – that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed – is the life that has been captured in this sphere.³⁸

The notion of sacrifice is particularly relevant in the case of the *Vie de sainte Cristine*, since solemn ritual sacrifice is an integral part of the faith of the saint's family. These acts are distinct from Urban's persecution of the Christians, who are a threat to the carefully defined 'sovereign sphere'. Christina's refusal to participate in the sacrificial rituals aligns her with Bartleby who, in saying 'I would prefer not to', retains a non-exclusionary

³⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trs. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Meridian (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 90. Several contemporary studies of medieval literature and culture have explored the applicability of Agamben's *homo sacer* to a variety of scenarios of exclusion, including saints' lives; see, for example, Campbell, 'Homo Sacer: Power, Life, and the Sexual Body in Old French Saints' Lives', *Exemplaria* 18.2 (2006), 233-73; Huot, *Madness in Medieval French Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 65-91; and Robert Mills, 'Sovereign Power and Bare Life in Poetry by François Villon', *Exemplaria* 17.2 (2005), 445-80. On the use of 'bare life' in analysis of visual culture, see Valentin Groebner, *Defaced: The Visual Culture of Violence in the Late Middle Ages*, trs. Pamela Selwyn (New York: Zone Books, 2004).

³⁸ Agamben, p. 82.

sovereignty.³⁹ In this refusal, she denies Urban the opportunity to spare her, demonstrating the failure of his own exclusionary regime and making her martyrdom inevitable. Žižek claims that ‘this is how we pass from the politics of “resistance” or “protestation,” which parasitizes upon that which it negates, to a politics which opens up a new space outside the hegemonic position *and* its negation.’⁴⁰ The radically new space opened up in the *Vie de sainte Christine* is constituted simultaneously by the father who makes his daughter *sacer* and the daughter who refuses to obey his commands, as dynastic hegemony is subsumed within the divine order. In his use of Agamben in analysis of the work of Villon, Robert Mills argues that the relevance of the notion of the *homo sacer* to representations of martyrdom is limited. While I agree with Mills that ‘the saint conceives his or her pained body as visually and discursively meaningful, [while] the fear expressed by Villon’s speaker is precisely that his torments won’t be seen or heard’, I believe that, from the vantage point of the father-tyrant in the narrative, the notion of Christina being excluded from the law still makes sense.⁴¹ Gautier’s narrative is a snapshot of the saint’s inevitable triumph, repeated with every subsequent conversion. In light of his miracle tales, we can read the *Vie de sainte Cristine* as part of a programme of glorification of the celestial family.

The ambiguity of paternity in this text forces a reimagining of what the past means for both present and future. The figure of the mother, though less prominent than the father in this narrative, also provokes reflection on how the saint makes herself inhumane, or, to use Agamben’s term, ‘whatever’, in order to transcend her genealogical identity at the same time as she furnishes other Christians with a means to become incorporated into an alternative ‘family’.⁴² Christina’s mother speaks on one occasion only, when she goes to visit her daughter in prison after her first bout of torture at the hands of Urban. Initially shocked at her husband’s treatment of their child, her sympathy for Christina is rapidly transformed into disgust at the girl’s disobedience:

³⁹ Žižek, *The Parallax View*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), p. 381. See also Agamben: ‘the sovereign is the point of indistinction between violence and the law, the threshold on which violence passes over into law and law passes over into violence.’ (*Homo Sacer*, p. 32).

⁴⁰ Žižek, *The Parallax View*, pp. 381-82.

⁴¹ Mills, p. 463.

⁴² ‘Whatever-being’ is asserted by Agamben as existence consisting of pure and unlimited potentiality: ‘The being that is properly whatever is able to not-be; it is capable of its own impotence.’ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trs. Michael Hardt, *Theory Out of Bounds* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 34.

'Ton cuer, fille, ou estoit si grant sens assenez,
 Por quoi despit la loi et les dieux ensement
 Ou li sage ont creü des le commencement?' (ll. 1208-10)

'Daughter, why does your heart, which was so filled with good sense, hate the
 faith and the gods in whom the wise have believed since the beginning?'

The mother's concern is linked to a view of Christina's conversion as a rebellion against nature, against the way things have always been. This goes beyond Urban's condemnation of her for her disobedience of him, as it legitimizes his will as coinciding with accepted orthodox practice at the same time as reinforcing the view of the saint as being out of her mind in disagreeing with 'li sage'. Her attention to a 'commencement' is particularly significant for this reading of this text, as its vagueness suggests unfavourable comparison with the origins of the Christian narrative into which Christina is to be incorporated. Later in her passion, Christina will speak the narrative of Christian creation placed in her mouth by God, but in this criticism by her mother she is rhetorically loosed from her genealogical bonds by being confirmed as exceptional.

Far from being swayed or shamed by this, Christina embraces her exceptional stance, calling on God to remove her 'charnel amistié toute' (l. 1257) when her mother rips open her dress and begs Christina to take pity on her: 'Fille, voi cy les costes que ix mois te porterent / Et les lasses mameles que ta bouche alaiterent' (ll. 1245-46: 'Daughter, look at the body that carried you for nine months, and the pitiful breasts that fed you'). Christina disassociates herself from her, driving the mother to mutilate herself and threaten suicide, as she reminds Christina of both her future inheritance and her duty to take care of her parents in old age. In this moment of physical exposure, the girl hardens herself against her mother's appeals to think of the future in terms of material possessions and mortal obligations. She withdraws further from identification with her family by glossing her own name in such a way as to completely replace her mortal parents with the immortal power and love of God:

'Mais consentir nel vieult le hault roi Jhesucrist
 De cui non le mien est contrefaiz et escriz.
 Mon non ensuit le sien, et je si l'ensuvrai
 Que de pere et de mere por lui me consuvrai
 Et d'umain heritage, dont lez chaitis s'eritent
 Qui por l'aise du cors les ames deseritent.
 Por rien que vos diés ne serai engigniee.

Ne croi c'onques eüst en toute no ligniee
 Dame ne damoisele, pucele ne meschine
 Qui fust onques nommee n'apelee Cristine.⁴³
 'Non voir, ma douce fille, onc parler n'en oï.'
 La virge li respont, qui molt s'en esjoï:
 'Dieu en puisse aorer, le puissant Roi celestre,
 Quant par sa grant douceur mon parrin deigna estre.
 Crestienne m'apele qui me nomme Cristine
 Le douz non Jhesucrist tout le mien enlumine
 Quant il de son saint non deigna le mien dorer.
 Ains lairoie mes ieuz d'un tarere forer
 Et les dens de ma bouche un et un fors sachier
 Que de lui me laissasse sevrer ne destachier.
 Mere, mon non me doit apenre et recorder
 Qu'aus euvrez Jhesucrist me doi bien acorder.' (ll. 1321-42)

'But the high king Jesus Christ does not allow [for me to be softened by your deceiving words], whose name is imitated and rewritten in my own. My name follows his, and so I will follow him, and for him I will distance myself from my father and mother and from human inheritance, which is prized by the wretched who overthrow their souls for the sake of physical comfort. I will not be deceived by anything you say. I do not think there has ever been anyone of our line, lady or girl, maiden or young woman who was ever named Christina.'

'In truth, no, my dear daughter, I have never heard of it.'
 The virgin replies joyfully 'God be praised, the mighty King of Heaven, when by his great sweetness he deigned to be my godfather. The one who named me Christina named me a Christian, and Jesus Christ illuminates my name with his sweet name when he consented to gild my name with his holy name. I would rather have my eyes and teeth ripped out one by one than let myself be divided from him. Mother, my name should teach me that I ought to obey Jesus Christ.'

This meditation on the significance of Christina's illuminated name itself illuminates the reason for her devotion.⁴³ Christianity is literally her calling. It is not clear from the account of her birth who gave her the name 'Christina', but in her claim here that her godfather (or God-the-father) gave her a name which was a reflection of his own we might detect a particularly vocal dimension to her relationship with her creator.⁴⁴ This passage also reinforces the mutual verbal communication between Christina and God, recalling the introductory passage where we are told that Urban is given a child by God

⁴³ The use of 'enlumine' could also hint at the art of producing manuscripts, recalling Urban's claim to have 'written' her life; on the 'semantic overlap between words of writing and painting' see Busby, p. 49. See Kathryn A. Duys, 'Minstrel's Mantle and Monk's Hood: The Authorial Persona of Gautier de Coinci in his Poetry and Illuminations', in Krause and Stones (ed.), pp. 37-63.

⁴⁴ On the significance of speech acts in establishing kinship in medieval literature see Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies*.

'por essaucier son non' (l. 85). Christina sees the kinship established through her name as a sufficient guarantee of her faith and her fate to warrant her indifference to the damage done to her body, and her everlasting life separated from this body is underlined in her declaration that she would prefer partition of flesh and bone to separation from God. In her insistence upon the identity between name and substance, she recalls her earlier claims to honesty in her verbal exchange with Urban; she is exactly what she seems to be, and is unique within her family. Moreover, her subsequent confirmation of her devotion to God in spite of all threats and attempts to reason with her inverts the opposition between order and disorder established by Urban and continued by his wife; 'Mieux vueil vers tot le mont avoir descordement / Que je n'aie s'amor et son concordement' (ll. 1347-8: I would rather be out of tune with the whole world than not have his love or be in harmony with him). In the eyes of her parents and their peers, Christina may appear to be at odds with the world and all that gives it meaning, but her expressed desire for harmony prefigures the realignment of the secular world, as her contemporaries are subsequently converted to Christianity. While she has, in some respects, lost her reason, the intervention of God to perform miracles through and for her establishes new parameters of rationality, and those who truly are unreasonable are those who fail to see these miracles for what they really are. Reason, then, is not opposed to faith in this text; instead, the faith of the saint is both proof and justification of the power of a God who can guarantee reason in apparent madness and demonstrate the insubstantiality of the works and powers of mortal leaders.

The power to act and to initiate material change is key to understanding Urban's unacknowledged (by him, at least) divine pretensions, revealed in his frequent use of forms of 'faire', as in his vows to 'refaire' his gods and 'desfaire' his daughter. In this speech, he is simultaneously determined that his will be done and fearful that it may have been defied:

'Par tous mes dieux,' *fait* il, 'touz est venus li poins
 Que te *ferai desfaire*, car tu l'as bien *mesfait*,
 S'orendroit ne me dis que de mes dieux as *fait*.
 Je n'osasse cuidier que ja penser osasses
 Que mes dieux *desfesisses* ne mon temple robassez.' (ll. 1076-80, emphasis mine)

‘In the name of all my gods,’ he says, ‘the time has come when I will have you unmade, for you will have done wrong if you do not tell me straight away what you have done to my gods. I do not dare to believe what I now dare to think, that you should have destroyed my gods or ruined my temple.’

This repetition highlights another dimension of the processes and transformations represented in this text. It also illuminates Urban’s idea of a self-centred ethics of creation at odds with more modest endeavours such as the production of this text, dependent as it is upon existing material. His threat to unmake Christina can be interpreted as an act of revenge for her destruction of the idols in his temple, and in his claim that he has ‘written’ her life he asserts his right to rule over her. His vanity leads him to believe that all that can be made can also be unmade, which is tantamount to a denial of his own mortality. In spite of his confident declarations Urban eventually makes himself a parody of a god, as all his attempts to impose his will on Christina fail. Neither she, nor any of the Christians who follow her, can truly be unmade, since even after their deaths their souls are assured of the heavenly repose she enjoys. Unlike the smashed idols, their existence is more than material, and they cannot be made to disappear in the same manner that Christina makes the old gods disappear by distributing their shattered remains among the people of the town. It is of vital importance that this redistribution should be motivated by human conscience and achieved by non-miraculous means, as it reinforces the didactic intent of the narrative; medieval Christians may no longer experience circumstances where they are obliged to die for their faith, but they can still participate in the narrative by imitating Christina’s charity.

This problematized relationship between entities and their constituent parts – and the transcendent power of speech – is even more clearly demonstrated in the graphic episode in which Julien has Christina’s tongue cut out. He is desperate to silence her, restricting what he sees as the diabolic overflow of her speech. In spite of this mutilation, words continue to fall from her mouth condemning Julien for his cruelty, and she picks up the severed tongue, striking him so hard with it that he is blinded in one eye (ll. 3553-56). This replicates the punishment of the first group of torturers, who are also struck blind. Here, however, the blow is an actual physical contact between the organ of speech and the organ of sight. Julien is made to suffer for his blindness to the true nature of the miracles by being literally blinded. The mouth which continues speak implicitly mocks the necessary connection between causes and effects presumed in the use of torture to

extract compliance, and while the blood streams down Julien's face the witnesses to this marvel hear every word spoken through and to Christina loudly and clearly. His gods, whom Christina repeatedly describes as 'ydras muetes', are once again shown to be powerless to intervene on the behalf of their devotees.

It would not be entirely accurate to say that Christina is deracinated from history in her transition from a pagan child to be married off, maintaining her family's status in the propagation of imperial values, to a virgin martyr with no means of relation to any history beyond the suffering of her own body. She is in fact acutely aware of the relationship between past, present and future; her accounts of the origin (Creation) and conclusion (Day of Judgment) of time structured according to Christian belief are much more detailed than her mother's 'commencement', and the non-Christians' disregard for any reward or punishment which is located outwith the secular sphere. What this text entails is a turning inside-out of the notion of causal closure which confines reason to that which is explicable in materialist terms. The hagiographer represents the saint as a means for demonstrating God's power to his doubters, positing a cause which is beyond mortal understanding and changing the definition of who may be described as 'sage':

Li sage et li discret qui plus sont ancien,
 Couvertes crestiennes et couvertz crestien,
 Dient que de son sens n'ist pas ce qu'ele touche,
 Ainz est chose devine qui parole en sa bouche.
 Toute humaine science ce qu'ele dit surmonte. (ll. 3671-5)

The wise and discreet elder ones, men and women converted to Christianity, say that the things she does do not come from within her, but that it is something divine that speaks through her. What she says exceeds all human knowledge.

These comments, which appear late on in the text, are among the few to credit with speech any living Christians other than Christina. In acknowledging the miracles as supernatural events, Christian converts are characterized as correct readers of the spectacles Julien misinterprets as witchcraft. Gautier may resist including wisdom among the conventional good qualities of literary noble Christian women in his descriptions of Christina, preferring to emphasize her beauty, purity and devotion, but it is significant that he attributes understanding to those who have been converted by her. In showing them the route to heaven, she has shifted the conclusion of the existential narrative to

the zone beyond death and freed them from concern over the perishability of the material world.

4. Heaven and the tower: means and ends

It must be remembered that the success of Christina's endeavours in the name of God are not limited to the realm of the afterlife. The representation of the places she inhabits both before and after her death makes clear the Christianization of the urban and imperial landscapes. The distinctions between Christina's self-definition and the attempts at control by Urban may be most clearly illustrated with a comparison of their very different notions of heaven. Of course, Urban's theology does not have a space corresponding to heaven, but the tower he builds for Christina can be viewed as a counterpart to it.⁴⁵ The similarities between these two locations illuminate the clash between Christian teleological narrative, offering the relief of salvation, and the trap of 'pagan' cyclical repetition. More specifically, Gautier's narrative design, whereby the troubled, almost-Christian girl moves away from darkness and isolation towards light and unity with the divine, is a mirror to both the redemption of matter and the ascent to heaven; as Christina's soul is borne upwards, her body is brought back to the temple in the tower, which becomes her tomb.

Motivated by his fears that Christina may convert to Christianity, Urban builds her a tower, incorporating a temple to his gods, principally Apollo. His efforts to beautify it signify a striving for earthly perfection, and support a reading of Urban's preparation of the tower as an attempt to build a heaven on earth. Within it is contained all that he believes to be good (the gods, his treasure, and Christina), while it excludes that which he thinks is evil (Christianity). In his assembly of this sacred place we see the threefold objects of the idolator's worship, which might be taken as a profane anti-trinity, though it is worth noting that in his invocations of his gods they rarely form a trio, appearing instead in either twos or fours. The love he shows Christina is significantly different to the Christians' adoration of her, since the father places her in the position of a god, while the Christians love her because of God's favour towards her and the miracles he works

⁴⁵ On the symbolic values ascribed to towers and tower-building, see Theodore Ziolkowski, *The View from the Tower: Origins of an Antimodernist Image* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 5-40.

through her. The tower may be seen, then, as a temple, cloister, paradise and pedestal – from Urban's point of view, at least.

Christina's view of it is, however, markedly different. Uncertain of her faith at the point when she is placed in the tower, she grows stronger in her Christian conviction as she becomes filled with the Holy Spirit, and refuses to bow to the idols. She also resists all her companions' attempts to make her comfortable, refusing food and water in defiance of her father's orders when he and Christina's mother come to worship at the temple. Her private place of worship within the temple is its only window, which, conveniently, faces east:

Ens ou temple Apollin avoit une fenestre
 Richement compassee, molt i avoit bel estre.
 Contre oriant estoit, ce tesmoigne l'istoire.
 La faisoit li saint enfes par nuit son oratoire,
 La ardoit son encens, la ardoit son storace.
 Raemplie l'avoit Saint Esprit de sa grace. (ll. 461-66)

In the temple of Apollo there was a richly dressed and very beautiful window. It faced east, according to the story. The holy child said her nightly prayers there, burning her incense and storax. The Holy Spirit had filled her with his grace.

Christina's reinterpretation of the confines of the temple sheds further light on the distinction Gautier makes between her father's concern for his authority over her and the spiritual concerns of the girl for herself. While she does not seem to want to escape from Urban's imitation of heaven, she is disgusted by the objects with which he has filled it, and so uses the only neutral element of the space – the threshold between inside and outside – as the focal point for her devotion. The unobscured window is a means to communication with God, its function as an exit point for the idols and for Christina herself a visual reminder of the Christian's attention to the division between this world and the next.

The theme of enclosure in the lives of female saints is treated quite differently by Brigitte Cazelles and Cary Howie; while Cazelles sees enclosure – both literal, as in Christina's case, and figurative as in the cases of the transvestite saints Marina and Euphrosina – as a function of masculine discourse's reduction of women to objects, Howie regards

enclosure as a paradoxically empowering element in the progress towards sainthood: 'the disclosure of sainthood depends upon a set of architectural, bodily, and discursive enclosures'.⁴⁶ Gautier's *Christina* illustrates aspects of both these perspectives, but ultimately Howie's view of the subversive potential of enclosure is the more potent. Christina's imprisonment not only provides a setting for her spiritual awakening, but it reconfigures the material architecture of faith, as the unapproachable pedestal becomes a transformative shrine. Initially a site of exclusion, the tower has, by virtue of the sanctifying presence of Christina's body, become a new route to heavenly favour and forgiveness.⁴⁷ In this incorporation of a former pagan monument to stasis into the rhythms of Christian worship and celebration, material bodies and the world they inhabit are offered fresh hope of everlasting life.

Gautier alludes to this delimiting function of the tower in an earlier comment on Christine's situation: 'Ainsi est en la tor la damoisele enclose / Dont toute vilenie banie est et forsclose.' (ll. 407-8: 'And so the lady is shut away in the tower from where all baseness is banished and forbidden.'). But from whose point of view do we look at the tower in these lines? On one level Gautier may simply be making a sarcastic point about Urban's perception of Christianity, since 'vilenie' conforms with the terms used by Dion to describe the adherents to the new faith ('Tous ceux qui en lui croient sont folz et ydiote' l.2233). On another level, though, this may be a foreshadowing of the redemption of the structure through its becoming the resting place for the saint's miraculous corpse. It may contain idols at this early point in the narrative, but because they are ignored by Christina they are nothing more than statues.⁴⁸ By contrast, the Holy Spirit which flourishes within Christina might be said to sanctify the place even while she is alive, effectively turning it into a hermit's cell. In reconfiguring the relationship between inside and outside, 'vilenie' could describe everything that is material and outwith the bond between the saint and her true spouse/father. The irony is that while Urban regulates his daughter's quarters in

⁴⁶ Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint*, pp. 63-68; Howie, *Claustrophilia*, p. 69.

⁴⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 318-43.

⁴⁸ Michael Camille notes the attention to disputes over specific holy sites in literature of the Crusades, and cites the testimony of a pilgrim to Jerusalem, John of Wurzburg, who visited the Dome of the Rock a few decades before its recapture by the Muslims. Camille reads John's comments on the Muslims' disapproval of the presence of the cross thus: 'Although both Christian and Muslim venerated the same site, not accepting the true sign of the cross made the non-Christian's veneration idolatry in the eyes of this commentator.' *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 137-38.

order to protect her from what he sees as corruption, he is in fact giving her a place for communion. It is only at the moment when Christina is called upon to publicly demonstrate that she is keeping faith with her father and ancestors that this semi-anchoritic model of individual devotion becomes impossible, and the process of turning the place of idolatry into a space for approaching the divine becomes necessary.

Christina's treatment of the idols gives us further clues to the relationship between this location and the heaven she longs for. Under cover of darkness God gives her the strength to pull down, mock and destroy the statues in the temple. She pushes them out of the window and tears down the wall hangings and decorations, emptying the temple of its profane contents, and she makes a cord from the remaining cloth in order to climb down to the ground and complete her work. She demonstrates the virtue of charity by distributing the gold and silver remnants of the smashed statues to the poor and sick of the town, disposing of both her inheritance and the objects of her family's faith. This act of destruction and redistribution reflects the text's wider concerns with the effects of Christian conversion upon the individual's relationship to the material world. The very forms giving structure to the pre-existing faith have been broken apart, reduced to loose jewels and fragments of precious metals. In this state they become parodies of the holy relics of the church, whose distribution to all regions of Christendom in the course of the Middle Ages does not diminish their sacred efficacy.⁴⁹ These gods have already come to represent mute impotence in Christina's eyes, but she is able to find new uses for what she previously regarded as being without value. Her gifts to those in need casts the prosperity that Urban and his accomplices claim the gods have brought to their country in a different light; while these benefits have clearly not 'trickled down' to the poorest citizens of Tyre, the smashed remnants of the idol cult, given to them by the servant of God, are at least of some immediate assistance to them.

In the breaking up of the statues Christina does the very opposite of what her father had promised to do with them, and in this scene of distribution we might see an inverted and much simplified allusion to the imagery of the Eucharist, further mocking the trappings of

⁴⁹ Julia M. H. Smith, 'Old saints, new cults: Roman relics in Carolingian Francia', *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West. Essays in Honour of Donald A. Bullough*, ed. Julia M. H. Smith (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 317-35. The anonymity of Christina's donations extends the parody, as they fail to enter into an economy of reciprocal support and identification, as Smith argues relics do: 'As mediators of friendship between emperors, kings, bishops, aristocrats and the papacy, Roman relics travelled along routes of obligation, loyalty and reward: their possession is an isotopic tracer of royal or imperial affiliation.' (p. 332).

Urban's faith. Through the consecration of the host, it assumes the ritual position of the body of Christ; through the destruction of the statues, believed to be gods, they are reduced to lifeless matter. While receiving the host is a partaking of the body of Christ, giving spiritual strength to the recipient, the anonymous distribution of the fragments of gold, silver and jewels provides material benefit. Where the God who is present in the consecrated host is not actually visible in the moment of elevation, the grossly physical idols can be perceived by all the senses, and their lifelessness is emphasized by their inability to resist destruction.⁵⁰ Finally, the means by which the idols are 'deconsecrated' involves them falling to the ground, moving in the opposite direction to the host at the elevation, when it is made most visible to the congregation. The allusion may reflect on the increasing significance of elevation in liturgical practice in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries as 'it came to be seen as possessing some sacramental efficacy.'⁵¹ This brief episode, which is avowedly anti-miraculous, only reaffirms Christina's status as 'gemme esmeree', of the same order as the 'tresor' metaphor for enriching knowledge used in the prologue; both the saint and the narrative of her life are precious treasures which must be preserved and kept present. Her body and soul are split at the point of death, and her physical remains act as a reminder to the living of the possibility of contact with the divine through genuine miracles and eventual access to heaven.

It is notable that Christina's opponents' disgust at Christianity is expressed in their disdain for those who renounce immediate comfort in preference for poverty in this life and riches in the next:

'Assez vault mieux ung "tien" que .ij. "tu les aras".
 Molt est fol qui guerpist toute beneürté
 Por atente des biens dont on n'a seürté.
 Les biens de l'autre siecle sont un incerte atente.
 Qui de rien s'i affie, son tans pert et s'entente.
 Fol est qui laist le bien tant com le puist avoir
 Tant com dure sa vie, ce doiz tu bien savoir,
 Mais tous jors crestien le pis vont senechant.' (ll. 2346-53)

⁵⁰ Bynum, 'Seeing and Seeing Beyond: The Mass of St Gregory in the Fifteenth Century', in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (Princeton: Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University, 2006), pp. 208-40 (pp. 213-14).

⁵¹ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 63. On the increasingly tight regulation on where the Eucharist may be received and the growing belief in its miraculous properties in this period, see Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event, 1000-1215* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987), pp. 13-18; Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, pp. 28-34.

'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Anyone who shuns all good fortune in the hope of uncertain gains is completely mad. The benefits of the other world are unknown. He who puts his faith in nothingness is out of his mind. Anyone who lets fall the things he might hold for his whole life is mad, as you should know, but every day the Christians go around preaching misery.

Dion's criticism here exemplifies the anti-Christians' typical (in this text) disregard for what may happen after death. Like Urban, the companions in the tower, and the people of Tyre prior to their conversion, he is keen for Christina to appreciate what she has and to think of the present rather than the future. This is intimately connected with the practice of their faith and their gods, who reward their prayers and devotion while they are still living. Yet the only significances Christina derives from the 'ydres muetes' (l. 1083) are death and sterility. She demonstrates their powerlessness by pushing them through the doorway between two worlds, an action which mimics the banishing of Satan and the discontented angels from heaven and prepares the tower to become her final sanctified resting place. She does not perform any magic or miracles in making the gods 'disappear', and it may appear to Urban that the place has been desecrated (ll. 1034-5: 'Ainz mais ne fu nul templez si hideus ne si laiz, / Il samble que diable i aient conversé'), but her actions work to erase the association between the temple and its builder, enabling its transformation into a Christian monument.

Heaven and the tower may also be compared in terms of their being defined by what is excluded from them. In the passage where Christina is led through the town before finally being executed, she describes what will happen to her after her death for the benefit of the crowd crying to her to save herself:

'Ge vois de mort a vie, de tristeur en lieesce.
 Ceste porcessions mon cuer molt m'esleesce
 Qui m'en maine a mes noces et a mon mariage.
 Onques mais damoisele n'eut en tot mon lignage
 Qui fust en mariage a tel honeur conduite.
 Le roi de la cité ou nule foiz n'anuite,
 Qui plus est cler et beau que souleil en esté,
 Qui toz jors est sans fin et tous jors a esté,
 Ou cuer des saintes virges m'ame coronera
 En la cité celestre ou sans fin vivera.
 La a riche cité, la a riche manoir,
 Bien fu nez de sa mere qui la porra manoir.
 Molt est grant, molt est forz, ne puet estre destruite,

De pierres precieuses fondee est et estruite,
 Maix tel garde les portes qui a nului nez euvre
 Qui ne soit net et mondez de toute vilaine euvre.
 Ja les a desfermees contre m'ame et ouvertes ;
 Ja me seront les joiez en apert descouvertes
 Que cuer ne set penser ne langue ne puet dire.
 Nul n'i est esmeüz ne destorbez par ire,
 Nul n'i puet mal penser, nul n'i puet tençon metre ;
 Nul n'i puet enveillir, empirer ne maumetre,
 Nul n'a nul mehaig, nul s'i puet doloir.
 Nul n'i set rien penser tot n'ait a son voloir :
 Aussi tost com le pense, aussi tost est il fait.' (ll. 3619-43)

'I am going from death to life, from sadness to joy. This procession gladdens me, as it brings me to my wedding day. No woman of my line has ever been married with such honour. The king of the city where night never falls, who is brighter and more beautiful than the summer sun, who is eternal and has always been, will crown my soul amid the holy virgins in the heavenly city where it will live for ever. It is a fine city, with fine buildings; he who could build it was born of a fine mother. It is very great and strong, it cannot be destroyed, its foundations and walls are built of precious stones, but the guard at its gates will not open them to anyone who is not whole and purified of all base deeds. Now they have been unlocked and opened to my soul; now the joys which are beyond imagination and description will be shown to me. No-one there is upset with anger, no-one can think bad thoughts, no-one can punish; no-one can grow old, decay or be wronged, no-one suffers, no-one can feel sadness. No-one can think of anything they wish for which is not done as soon as it is thought.'

The rigorous control over who has access to the celestial city is perhaps analogous to Urban's control over access to the tower, as are the father and daughter's respective perceptions of their own particular versions of heaven as storehouses for valuable phenomena, be they material or moral (and it is noteworthy that there are 'pierres precieuses' in both earthly and eternal heavens). However, Christina's utopian vision differs from her father's in two key respects. In her heaven, Christina *is* to be married, and this heaven knows no death, only eternal life in which all desire is satisfied. Its majesty is incapable of being recast or improved.

Conclusion

The *Vie de sainte Christine* is deeply concerned with how families are structured, but even more than this it is permeated with an awareness of the interplay and clash between

words and actions. Gautier draws on the same veneration for the sanctity of the Virgin in his portrayal of the embedded narrative of failed paternal control within the larger frame of Christina's descent from and return to heaven; Urban's claim to have 'written her life' confirms his status as an anti-hagiographer, who associates the word with ownership and enclosure rather than as a means for communicating the works of God. The secular authorities attempting to regulate the sovereign sphere through the letter of their laws fail to recognize the divine order which speaks irrepressibly from a tongue-less mouth. Urban's attempt to drown Christina is only a success on her terms, since the last formal vestiges of her previous faith are dispersed, and the gift of baptism enables her eventual entry into heaven. In her asking to be baptised, she shuns her mortal inheritance and disassociates herself from her family in seeking incorporation with an immortal figure in a non-physical realm. Her desire, though she may not know it, is really for *reincorporation*. She is the gift given by the true Father to the failed one, and this perfecting amalgamation of her relationship with God-the-father and God-the-husband allows her to enact her father's model of sublimated desire in a zone where no other relationship is possible. Through her suffering and redemption she is able to enjoy an all-consuming union with the eternal, of which the quasi-incestuous designs of Urban are a pale imitation. It is the duty of the author to ensure that this 'tresor' is not buried by the inattention of those who hear of it, and while the power of God may be demonstrated through visual spectacle and aural impression, the piously motivated writings of Gautier and his fellow *clerics* are a worthy means for bringing miracles to their audience.

Chapter 3

Knowing your place: imperial history and authorial control in the *Vie de sainte Catherine*

'Iceste lei que nus tenum
D'anciené prise l'avum
Ki furent maistre e prince en Rume
E de religion furent sume.'¹ (ll. 231-34)

We have inherited this faith of ours from our ancestors, who were masters and princes of Rome and who were the perfection of religion.

Tony: You really would let me kill you, wouldn't you? You sick fuck!

Hillel: You ever heard of Masada? For two years, 900 Jews held their own against 15,000 Roman soldiers. They chose death before enslavement. And the Romans? Where are they now?

Tony: You're looking at 'em, asshole.²

The historical episode referenced in this episode of *The Sopranos* by Hillel, a Hasidic Jew refusing on pain of death to divorce the daughter of Tony Soprano's client, recalls an act of resistance in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. This may appear an appropriate analogy for the early Christian martyrs, particularly in light of the Roman element alluded to in the tyrant Maxence's defence of his faith above. However, I believe that the political dimension within Clemence of Barking's *Vie de sainte Catherine* (c.1180), especially the tension between the author-figure and Maxence, suggests a different way of reading this snapshot of mafia coercion and cultural difference. In Clemence's powerful and complex portrayal of Maxence's grasping of his moral defeat by Catherine and the Christians there is a fleeting, but strong, sense that it is he rather than the saint who is the victim. This life is located in a later period in the development of the early church than that of Christina of Tyre's martyrdom; by the point at which Catherine challenges Maxence in his temple, his polytheistic faith (unspecified by him or her in any

¹ All quotations in French are taken from *The Life of St. Catherine*, ed. William Macbain, Anglo-Norman Text Society (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964). Translations into English are my own.

² *The Sopranos*, series 1, episode 3 ('Fear, Denial, Anger, Acceptance', directed by Nick Gomez, 1999).

respect other than its Roman origin) is already a symbol of a superseded order.³ Unlike Urban, however, Maxence is referred to as 'rei', 'emperere' and 'tyran', but neither he nor his beliefs are described as 'païen'. Clemence's poem offers an unusual way of probing the question of what Rome stands for in the Middle Ages by placing it at the margin of Maxence's jurisdiction. Tony Soprano's identification of himself and his captains with the Roman soldiers besieging Masada goes further than the common location of their ancestors; it implies a battle which has already been won, but which is being perpetually replayed through the evocation of a dominant order which has survived by transforming itself.

So it is in the *Vie de sainte Catherine*, in which the introduction of the saint and her tormentor is preceded by a brief passage on Constantine; it tells of his conversion and his expulsion of Maxence, who refused to convert to Christianity, from Rome. The narrative then moves to Alexandria, where Maxence has overthrown Catherine's father, the king (who is not named in Clemence's poem). Maxence systematically persecutes the Christians in his lands and forces them to worship his gods. Catherine attempts to halt a mass sacrifice in honour of Maxence's gods, and when she condemns his faith he calls for fifty philosophers to disprove her. The philosophers are converted by Catherine's arguments, so Maxence puts them to death. When it becomes clear that she will not be persuaded to renounce her faith, Maxence has Catherine imprisoned. An enormous spiked wheel is devised for her torture, but when it is unveiled it is miraculously destroyed by an angel. Catherine subsequently converts Maxence's wife and Porphyre, his closest confidant, which results in their execution. Finally, the frustrated Maxence has Catherine beheaded; milk flows from the neck of her corpse, which is carried to Mount Sinai by angels, and the tomb in which it is laid perpetually emits a healing oil. In spite of the cult's claim to origins in late antiquity, the earliest reference to Catherine's

³ Maxence proves a counterpoint to the classical culture which shapes Catherine's response to her detractors; this contradictory relationship is comparable with that described by Julia Reinhard Lupton as the 'the two faces of Judaism in Christian historiography: on the one hand, the Old Testament represents the heroic yet naïve ground of modern faith that provides Christianity with its historic prototypes and patriarchs; on the other hand, the modern Jews who resist incorporation into the New Covenant instantiate the unrighteous remnant of the historical process who threaten to give the lie to its story of progress.' Lupton, *Afterlives of the Saints: Hagiography, Typology, and Renaissance Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 12. Jeremy Cohen goes further than this, arguing that thirteenth century popes Gregory IX and Innocent IV viewed their contemporary adherents to Talmudic Judaism as representing a heretical deviation from the Mosaic law; this is, Cohen argues, the justification for the confiscation and burning of the Talmud and other Jewish writings from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries (*Living Letters*, pp. 321-25).

martyrdom is the mid-tenth-century Greek Life by Simeon Metaphrastes; several surviving Greek and Latin lives are composed prior to the Anglo-Norman version referred to by Clemence in her prologue, and, apart from the wheel, the main thematic elements of Catherine's life are present from its earliest version onwards.⁴

This chapter will argue that the relationships between narrator, emperors and saint foreground the link between geographical places and power structures. Distance from the 'Roman' centre in terms of space, as in fourth-century Alexandria, or space and time, as in twentieth-century New Jersey, is a driving force in the narrative dynamic of both these episodes. They are both essentially about the consistency of laws underwriting the exercise of power at both the centre and on the edge of bounded jurisdictions. I will consider the mechanical means by which Maxence attempts to signify and enforce his authority, and finally will examine how his collapse into self-contradiction might alter the reader's perception of his place in the text and of the author's relationship to her material.

1. Locating the Author: Clemence and *clementia*

Unusually for a composer of a vernacular saint's life, this author identifies herself; in both Latin and vernacular saints' lives authors tend not to name themselves, as to do so would be to imply some form of ownership of the subject. Anonymous writers of texts such as the *Vie de saint Edouard* (which, like the *Vie de sainte Catherine*, was composed at Barking Abbey) employ conventional humility topoi in introducing their work. Thomas Heffernan refers to 'sacred biography' as simultaneously a product and perpetuation of a collective faith or cult group:

The author for sacred biography is the community, and consequently the experience presented by the narrative voice is collective. The principal reason for this is the dominant role given to the text's didactic element. The author is not the expert; rather the community is a collection of experts, and the narrative reflects this state of collective authority.⁵

⁴ Katherine J. Lewis, *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), pp. 46-49.

⁵ Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 19-20. See also Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "Clerc u lai, muïne u dame': Anglo-

While I agree with this assessment generally, the *Vie de sainte Catherine* represents an anomaly, and not only because of the inclusion of the author's name. I maintain that Clemence of Barking's statement of identity is only a part of her strategy of subtly writing herself into the life of Catherine, and that this complex relationship between author, text, subject and audience renders her simultaneously humble and powerful. The possible allusion to clemency in her name (which may be a pseudonym) implies a position from which she may judge the figures she represents, and this eventually offers a fresh way of reading Maxence's breakdown (ll. 2155-256), a scene to which I will return later.

Clemence's prologue extols the virtues and responsibilities of the writer, and she makes clear the special role authors have in the transmission of cultural values:

Cil ki le bien seit e entent
 Demustrer le deit sagement,
 Que par le fruit de sa bunté
 Seient li altre amonesté
 De bien faire e de bien voleir
 Sulunc ço qu'en unt le poeir. (ll. 1-6)

Those who know and understand goodness should show it wisely, so that the fruit of their goodness may be the gift to others of good deeds and good intentions, as much as they have the power to do them.

With a prefatory statement similar to that made in Marie de France's *Lais* on the duty of the knowledgeable to share their learning, Clemence positions herself as being appropriately qualified to produce this text.⁶ The poem's sophisticated blend of liturgical and *courtois* elements, explored in detail by Catherine Batt, reinforces the impression she creates of a modest yet accomplished interpreter of culture.⁷ The image of learning bearing fruit establishes the relationship between cause and effect which she is to explore in greater depth later in the text, as Catherine defends the doctrines of incarnation and resurrection before the philosophers:

Norman hagiography in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries', in *Women and Literature in Britain 1150-1500*, ed. by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.61-85.

⁶ 'Qui Deus a duné esciënce / e de parler bone eloquence, / ne s'en deit taisir ne celer, / ainz se deit voluntiers mustrer.' (ll. 1-4: 'Those to whom God has given wisdom and eloquent speech must not be silent or hide it; rather, they should show it willingly.') *Lais de Marie de France*, ed. by Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Lettres Gothiques* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1990).

⁷ Batt, 'Clemence of Barking's Transformations of *Courtoisie* in *La Vie de Sainte Catherine d'Alexandrie*', *New Comparison* 12 (1991), 102-123.

‘Mais pur ço que Deus hume fist,
 Fud dreit que l’ume maintenist,
 E que par hume venjast l’ume
 E par le froit vengast la pume.’ (ll. 997-1000)

‘But because God made man it was right that he should be man’s saviour, and that he should save man through man, and through the fruit avenge the apple.’

This organic metaphor, in which the fruit is Jesus and the apple represents the fall, is an early indication of Catherine’s (and Clemence’s) view of the order of the cosmos as guaranteed by God. In the aftermath of the resurrection, the original act of will splitting God from his creation becomes a metaphor for a process; the transfer of virtue from one (flawed, but capable of renewal) person to another.⁸ This is intimately linked to the paired notions of ‘voleir’ and ‘poeir’, which are of vital importance to the development of the narrative.

Here, as in texts from other genres which promote the virtues of ancestors and their superiority to the decadence of the author’s contemporaries, Clemence claims that her readers are in need of ‘essample e lei’ (l. 8). The prologue also indicates a concern with the art of poetry, drawing a parallel between good writing and good conduct, hinting that perhaps she herself, through her work, is as worthy of imitation as Catherine:

Pur sa pieté m’en deit aidier
 A cel ovre que vuil traitier
 D’une sue veraie amie,
 De qui voil translater la vie,
 De latin respundre en rumanz
 Pur ço que plus plaise as oianz.
 Ele fud jadis translaté
 Sulunc le tens bien ordené;
 Mais ne furent dunc si veisdus
 Les humes, ne si envius

⁸ Anke Bernau sees the positive cultural values of order and unity as being embodied in the figure of Catherine; see Bernau, ‘A Christian *Corpus*: Virginity, Violence and Knowledge in the Life of Catherine of Alexandria’, in *St Katherine of Alexandria: Texts and Contexts in Western Medieval Europe*, ed. by Jacqueline Jenkins and Katherine J. Lewis, *Medieval Women* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 109-30. The saint is also a master of dialectic, which is dependent upon discipline and order; see Sarah Kay, *Courtly Contradictions. The Emergence of the Literary Object in the Twelfth Century*, *Figurae* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 122-30. On the significance of organic imagery as metaphor for resurrection or redemption in the twelfth century, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 156-199.

Cum il sunt al tens ki est ore
 E après nus serrunt uncore.
 Pur ço que li tens est mué
 E des humes la qualité
 Est la rime vil tenue
 Car ele est asquans corrompue.
 Pur ço si l'estuet amender
 E le tens selunc la gent user. (ll. 29-46)

God, in his piety, should help me in this work I wish to undertake about a true friend to him, whose life I wish to translate, to reply to Latin in romance and so give greater pleasure to the audience. It has been translated previously, and by the standards of the day it was well done; but people were not as clever or demanding as they are today and shall be in the future. Because the times and people's virtues have changed, the verse is held in contempt, since it has become somewhat corrupted. Because of this it must be put right, and made suitable for people today.

In producing this work, Clemence aims both to instruct and to entertain her audience, and she sees her purpose as the improvement of the world.⁹ She criticizes implicitly her 'veisdus' audience, suggesting that disdain for the existing work is due to the deterioration of the audience rather than obsolescence of the text.¹⁰ Her work is not, however, without its conventional humility topoi: '[...] preisie estre n'en voil; / Il sul en deit loenge avoir / De qui sai mun povre saveir' (ll. 48-50: 'I do not want to be praised for [this work]; He alone should be praised, from whom I have gained my meagre knowledge'). Still, she carefully positions herself as a mediating voice, whose power resides in its ability to establish and regulate the relationships between the various elements in the production and enjoyment of the text.¹¹ In this respect, we might see Clemence rather than Catherine as the true counterpart to Maxence, whose defiance of God and emperor signifies rebellion against 'order' in both the political and the cosmic sense. Maxence's derives pleasure from the sight of Catherine, but he proves himself incapable of learning from her, and thus represents the bad reader as much as the bad ruler.¹² He cannot bear

⁹ In her study of the Catherine cult, Katherine J. Lewis suggests that Clemence's text is 'an exemplary life, but more entertaining than strictly didactic' due to 'the courtly elements she introduces [which] reveal something of her cultural and devotional interests'; I would argue, however, that in its attention to the practice of faith and praise for the coming Christian hegemony, there is still a case for reading it as an instructive narrative. Lewis, *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria*, p. 58.

¹⁰ M. Dominica Legge sees this as a rhetorical stance typical of twelfth-century writers, comparable, perhaps, with the prologue to the earlier *Vie de saint Alexis*. Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), pp. 68-69.

¹¹ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, pp. 182-3; Batt, 'Clemence of Barking's Transformations', pp. 104-6.

¹² The tension between revealed or 'heard' truth and the tradition of the written word which emerges in this text echoes the anti-Jewish sentiment underlying representations of modes of learning in late medieval

the fruit of rightful knowledge, unlike the Christians who, through their faith, are assured of eternal life. On God's authority, Clemence encloses Maxence within a political and spiritual cul-de-sac, robbing him of the power to impose his will upon the corner of the Roman Empire he has claimed for himself. Through her writing she creates an orderly system of power relationships, embodied in her movement between positions of framing and assessing the text.

The manner in which Clemence carves out a distinct role for the author of the poem is not in itself strikingly different from prologues to other hagiographic texts. Nevertheless, what sets this poem apart (relatively speaking) is Clemence's naming herself as author in the epilogue:

Jo ki sa vie ai translatee,
 Par nun sui Clemence numee.
 De Berkinge sui nunain.
 Pur s'amur pris cest oeuvre en mein.
 A tuz cels ki cest livre orrunt,
 E ki de bon coer l'entenderunt,
 Pur amur Deu pri e requier,
 Qu'il voillent Deu pur mei preier,
 Qu'il m'anme mette en pareis,
 E guart le cors tant cum ert vis,
 Ki regne e vit e regnera
 E est e ert e parmeindra. (ll. 2689-700)

I, who have translated her life, am named Clemence. I am a nun of Barking. I undertook this work for love of her. To all those who will hear this book and understand its true spirit, for the love of God, I beg and ask them to pray to God for me, so that he may place my soul in Paradise, and keep my body as he pleases, he who reigns and lives and will reign, and who is and was and will endure.

Her emphasis upon the text as a piece of work situates her in a multi-faceted relationship to her writing and her readers. She claims to be bringing an existing story to a new audience whom she hopes will be inspired to share in the author's love of God and to

Christian culture. Miri Rubin gives examples of negative and positive images of education in the cult of the Virgin (Jesus being bullied in the unruly Jewish classroom versus Jesus acquiring wisdom at his mother's knee) in *Mother of God*, pp. 202-3. Though Clemence's text is less overtly anti-Jewish than many other saints' lives, the criticisms of the Incarnation made by the non-Christian figures here are reminiscent of a major strand in Christian objection to Judaism in this period. See Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 167-218.

uphold the Christian faith. The life of the saint becomes reified through the repetition of 'translatee' from the prologue, since this term typically refers to the transfer of objects, especially relics, rather than texts. As the translation of relics is integral to the consecration of altars, we might interpret vernacular poetry as Clemence's own meticulously constructed place of worship insofar as it is both the medium for her expression of the wisdom she receives from God and a means of communicating that same wonder to her audience. If we are to regard this text as a partial reclamation of female sainthood in opposition to patriarchal authority, we may even see, as Jocelyn Wogan-Browne does, elements of comedy in such scenes as Catherine's mocking rejection of Maxence's proposed statue of her; this is interpreted by Wogan-Browne as a female author's reminder to the immediate audience of her cloistered sisters of the hollowness of 'romantic' gestures made by men.¹³ Finally, her plea for a place in heaven mirrors Christians' shared aspiration, reminding her audience of the ongoing work of prayer and observance. She reminds us in the epilogue once again that she is a translator who performs a worthy, if somewhat mechanical, function, but she also places herself alongside the saint by making the association between remembrance and prayer apply both to herself and Catherine. This does not necessarily imply that Clemence makes herself the equal of Catherine, but the structure of the *Vie de sainte Catherine*, in which a named author frames the passion of the martyr, places the author between the saint and the audience. The enclosing of the saint's life within the moral lesson and plea of the author mirrors the saint's arguments about the created status of everything except God. For Clemence, there is a clear moral duty attached to the dissemination of knowledge. If the saint makes the work of God apparent to the mortal, the translator-hagiographer is to be found both at the central crossing points of these relationships and on the margins; she is the figure who makes the saint known to the audience, simultaneously sharing in the future salvation of the Christian community and holding a privileged position within it.

2. Locating the Emperor(s): what's Rome to Maxence, or Maxence to Rome?

Maxence's relationship to the newly Christianized Roman Empire is characterized by contradiction. But while Catherine is able to negotiate a seemingly contradictory position

¹³ Wogan-Browne, 'Saints' Lives and the Female Reader', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 27. 4 (1991), 314-32 (p. 328).

in a strikingly humanist manner, proclaiming the authority of Plato when his writings can be interpreted as prophesying the coming of Christ (ll. 895-909), Maxence's internal conflicts leave him trapped, neutered, and an enemy to himself. Clemence does not seem to differentiate between the terms 'rei', 'tyran' and 'emperere', but the significance of his being named emperor is contextualized obliquely through references to Constantine, the 'real' emperor, who has already defeated Maxence once in repelling him from Rome:

Si cume les estoires dient
 Ki les anciens faiz desplient,
 Qu'en Rume ot jadis empereur
 Ki mult par ert de grant vigur.
 Constantius out nun sun pere,
 La bone Heleine fud sa mere.
 Il meime ot nun Costentin;
 A lui fud tut le regne aclyn. (ll. 51-58)

As is told in the stories of ancient times, there was an emperor in Rome who was very powerful. His father was named Constantius, the good Helena was his mother. He himself was named Constantine; the whole kingdom bowed to him.

This brief introduction, which locates the *Vie de sainte Catherine* in historical terms, is significant on a number of levels. Although the events of the narrative occur during his reign, Constantine's parents are named before he is. This figure of legitimization and reform of the Church is located firmly within a family, and although he himself will later be admired for his endorsement of Christianity, he is still placed in the context of mortal lineage and secular power. The genealogical dimension is amplified by the sainthood of Constantine's mother, Helena; she is both a spiritual and literal forebear to the first Christian emperor. This is distinct from the representation of Rome and Roman notions of genealogy in the *Vie de sainte Cristine*. In Gautier's text, Rome is the seat of an emperor fiercely opposed to the Christians, and it takes this emperor being drawn to a provincial city and destroyed by the power of God for the faith espoused by Christina to spread outwards through Italy. The imperial sphere governed by Constantine is separate from the restricted and localized space of the saint's passion, as the 'anciens faiz' are the subject of multiple narratives. These 'estoires' are implicitly separate from the 'vie' Clemence claims as her source in her prologue (l. 32); while there is one 'vie', there are an unspecified number of 'estoires' regarding the leadership of the Roman empire. In another Insular text of the twelfth century, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum*

britanniae, Constantine is represented as the British liberator of Rome from the tyranny of Maxentius, and his placement within the line of kings glorifies both his faith and his public office. Although the Catherine legend's dubious factual basis means that it is difficult to place this narrative in historical time, it nonetheless corresponds to twelfth-century interpretations of historical figures (notwithstanding the probable conflation of Maxentius and the persecutor Maximianus). The subtle evocation of imperial context is important to understanding the point of the narrative, in which the saint rather than the emperor is the link between an old order and a new one. Constantine is clearly an appropriate presence in a text from a generic tradition concerned with an idealized shift from community based upon family or kinship towards an inclusive Christian community.¹⁴

However, it is also important to the narrative that his presence should remain spectral and marginal, lest it detract from the central conflict between the saint and her adversary. Indeed, the only other reference to him in the text is oblique, as Catherine declares to Maxence that she will be avenged by 'un hume de nostre lei' (l. 1946), who may be reasonably identified as the Roman emperor. This sense of marginality to the text as a whole is perhaps surprising, given the close attention to Constantine in such a prominent section of it, but these lines also point to the level and nature of control the Roman emperor enjoys over his territories, and invites a comparison with Maxence, who sees himself as the centre of sovereign power in the text.¹⁵ Clemence's evocation of this conflict between power centres gives a much clearer focus to the disputes of the protagonists than, for example, John Capgrave's Middle English *Life of St Katherine* (fifteenth century), whose first book consists of nearly seven hundred lines describing the saint's royal ancestors and their rule in Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean; Capgrave's emphasis on the ancestry of the saint does not allow for as subtle an exploration of the

¹⁴ Heffernan, p. 27.

¹⁵ Considering the stature of Barking as a wealthy institution with well-educated nuns and close ties with the centre of political power in the period in which Clemence writes, it is possible to read her evocation of conflict between a 'good' ruler and one who refuses counsel and sets himself up as an absolute authority as a critical comment on the rule of Henry II. See Emily Mitchell, 'Patrons and Politics at twelfth-century Barking Abbey', *Revue bénédictine* 113: 2 (2003), 347-64; Legge, pp. 60-72; Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "'Clerc u lai, muine u dame': women and Anglo-Norman hagiography in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries," in *Women and Literature in Britain 1150-1500*, ed. by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 61-85 (pp. 67-68).

meaning of Rome as that composed by Clemence.¹⁶ This contrast between the distant but legitimate ‘real’ ruler and the self-crowned usurper within his borders will become increasingly important as Maxence’s challenges multiply. Clemence implies a willing deference in the citizens of the empire’s relationship with Constantine (l. 58: ‘a lui fud tut le regne aclyn’). The attentions and loyalties of the kingdom are drawn towards its centre, and Constantine exercises legitimate power over the region, inspiring loyalty to the ruler who ‘a saint’ iglise pais dunad’ (l. 59) which contrasts with the bullying approach of Maxence, who secures cooperation through force. The apparent peace established by Constantine represents the new norm, accentuating from the outset Maxence’s status as a deviant megalomaniac whose archaic excesses are to be neutralized in this apparent *pax christiana*.

In comparison with Constantine, Maxence appears a fairly conventional hagiographic villain. His position in relation to the geography of the text, however, is more complicated. He is an interloper in Catherine’s Alexandria, a city represented by Clemence as having a substantial, if not necessarily dominant, Christian population, who are cowed by Maxence’s aggressive enforcement of polytheistic worship.¹⁷ His first actions, driven by his ‘felun penser’ (l. 68), indicate his zealous imposition of his faith and consolidation of his power by summoning ‘tuz cels ki en sa mein sunt’ (l. 78: all those who are under his rule):

‘Li fort empereur Maxence
Mande comunement saluz.
Si come est dutez e cremuz
Que tuit viengent a curt oir
Sa volenté e parfurnir.
Se nul de vus le cuntredit
Ja pois n’avrad de mort respit.’ (ll. 80-86)

¹⁶ John Capgrave, *The Life of Saint Katherine of Alexandria*, ed. by Carl Horstmann, Early English Text Society (London: Kegan Paul, 1893).

¹⁷ Recent events may have given a particular resonance to this location. Alexandria had been occupied by Muslim forces less than two decades previously, and following the negotiated retreat of the occupying troops in 1167 the besieging Crusaders were keen to experience the city. William of Tyre’s contemporary account of this episode conveys a sense of Alexandria’s particular appeal to the Christian forces and its place in Western Europeans’ impressions of the east: ‘The Christians, for their part, were no less eager to enter the city so long the object of their desires. Wandering freely about the streets, they gazed at the ports and the ramparts; and by diligent observation they collected material from which, on their return home, they might oftentimes weave stories for their friends and refresh the minds of their listeners with agreeable converse.’ William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, trans. and ed. by Emily Atwater Babcock and A. C. Krey. 2 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), II, p. 341.

'The great emperor Maxence sends his greetings to all. As he is so greatly feared, all should come to court to hear and do his will. If any of you should speak against him then you will have no escape from death.'

In sending out this call to his subjects, he makes himself a centre towards which the dispersed members of his kingdom are drawn. Maxence differs from the vision of the seemingly benevolent Roman emperor evoked a few lines earlier, meaning that his actions can be read as an attempt to establish an alternative empire without reference to the wider political entity. The contrast may be most clearly seen in a comparison of the expression of Constantine's authority – 'A lui fud tut le regne acin' – with the more fearful reaction to Maxence in 'Que pur amour, que pur pour / Tuit s'asemblent al nommé jur' (ll. 89-90: Whether out of love or fear, all presented themselves on the appointed day). The self-crowned pagan emperor attempts to make himself a rival to the force which exiled him from his own city, but he himself is characterized from the outset as fearful.

Despite vigorous assertions of his power later in the text, he is first introduced as an object rather than a subject, and as having already been defeated: 'Icist Maxentiun venqui / Ki sun regne out a tort saisi' (ll. 61-2: He [Constantine] crushed Maxence, who had wrongfully seized his kingdom). This impression of his unacknowledged limitation is reinforced by Catherine's reference to her avenger, who is identified by his faith rather than by his place of origin. Maxence's failed coup on his home city has forced him to flee, and, like the Trojans of the *Roman d'Eneas*, he carries his faith with him. Unlike the Trojans, however, he is not permitted to establish a new settlement elsewhere. Maxence's idea of Rome is necessarily identified with the past, so he and his gods stand ultimately as symbols of failure rather than survival; it is a place he can no longer call his home. In the defence of his faith cited at the beginning of this chapter, Maxence refers to both nobility and anteriority to justify himself. For him, the pre-Christian order cannot be superseded, and the approval of his noble and pious ancestors is guarantee enough for his preference for his own faith over the 'lei cruele' (l. 235) of the Christians. This strategy is also an attempt to localize the beliefs of the saint as a temporary aberration, in contrast with his own long-standing and perceivedly unblemished faith and heritage. Yet it is Maxence who has been excluded from the city he claims as his own, and Constantine's endorsement of a creed he rejects cuts him off literally and, through the implicit downgrading of his own faith, spiritually, from his origins. He may well attempt to

establish his own kingdom, but he is still within the boundaries of his displacing vanquisher, as Constantine's fleeting presence in the text reminds us. While Maxence does not face any military or political challenge to his rule in the duration of the narrative, his ability to terrify his subjects is progressively diminished by his being beaten in every non-physical sense by a teenage girl empowered by her link with God. The physically immediate saint and the spectral, distant emperor who undermine and destroy Maxence – both of whom are converts – are the emblems of the new status quo.

Comparison of the figures of Maxence and Clemence further demonstrates the problematic nature of control of space for the emperor. As I have argued above, Clemence is both at the centre and on the margins of the *Vie de sainte Catherine*, and this confers upon her particular power and privilege. In this respect, she may appear to resemble Maxence, who is both the centre of his own autonomous kingdom and in the hinterland of the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, Maxence fails to acknowledge his subordination to the emperor, and thus cannot conceive of himself as a marginal figure. His confidence is, however, shaken as the saint's passion unfolds. In the course of his attempts to impose uniformity of religious practice in the city his power to command others wanes, and he realizes that the place he occupies is under pressure from those who submit to his punishments but subvert their meaning, recalling the rhetorical trickery Christina uses to avoid marriage. His presupposed exceptionalism is held up to ridicule, and his legislative autonomy collapses in the face of Christians emboldened by Catherine who are ready to die for God. The martyrdom of unsacrificeable outlaw Christians signals towards the space of heaven, and brings a version of the miraculous to the heart of Maxence's kingdom by inspiring yet more rebellion against him. Maxence comes to occupy the role of thwarted torturer, identified by Joyce Salisbury in terms of bodily relations in the practice of martyrdom: the persecutor's failed attempt to dehumanize the martyr and reduce her to a body in extreme pain rebounds, as the victim transcends this pain and embraces extra-corporeal eternity.¹⁸ In this case, the relationship between torturer and victim is eventually reversed, and Maxence's public power is reduced to virtually nothing. As a result of the embrace of the eternal over the transient preached by the Christian church and its saints, he and his faith are denied any space in which their order can survive. Meanwhile, the other adversary, the 'hume de nostre lei' (l. 1946),

¹⁸ Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs: Unintended Consequences of Ancient Violence* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), p. 26.

stands on the opposite side of him to the saint, waiting to act on behalf of Catherine and his new faith by punishing a rebel within his empire. While Maxence tries (and fails) to impose his laws by insisting upon his will as the first cause of the law, both Catherine and, according to the saint, Constantine, recognize themselves as the executors of God's will on earth, and they act together to squeeze him out of the narrative of ascendant Christianity.

3. Place and the Saint

In comparison with the relationships between secular rulers and place I have examined above, the relationship saints have to place is perhaps more problematic; place implies embodied existence, a state which saints seek to transcend, whether through martyrdom or ascetic endurance.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the power that martyrs in particular seem able to exercise in public directly influences the capacity for others to maintain control over the public realm. Saints like Catherine may act as intermediaries between two very different types of kingdom. Catherine is associated with Alexandria through her royal birth, and although the poem makes little of Maxence's overthrow of her father it is nonetheless worth considering the saint's status as disinherited from the sphere of secular power.²⁰ She is identified with the city, but appears neither able nor willing to drive away the self-installed ruler who has taken control of it. As her later claim that she will be avenged suggests, Catherine seeks to prove Maxence and his beliefs wrong rather than to depose him; she does not seem to seek any form of secular power, and in spite of her opposition to Maxence's religious beliefs she does not question the legitimacy of his holding high office. In fact, she first acknowledges him with the words: 'Emperere, ta dignité / Requier que seies salué' (ll. 201-2: 'Emperor, your rank demands that you should be

¹⁹ Sarah Kay, 'The Sublime Body of the Martyr: Violence in Early Romance Saints' Lives', in *Violence in Medieval Society*, ed. by Richard W. Kaeuper (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2000), pp. 3-20.

²⁰ Greater prominence is given to Catherine's genealogy in the verse and prose lives that appear in England after the twelfth century, with some explicitly linking her to Britain through a blood tie with Constantine himself. 'The claim that Katherine has a special tie to Britain can be seen as part of a developing nationalist discourse, which also directs Arthurian narratives in establishing the country as a special locus of sanctity and heroism. This discourse also allowed Anglo-Norman historians to create a continuity between the Norman rulers (and their descendants) and the legendary rulers of Britain.' (Lewis, *The Cult of St Katherine*, p. 46).

saluted').²¹ Although the apolitical stance of martyrs may, on closer examination, reveal more profound insights into social relations than the saints themselves seem prepared to acknowledge, the importance of this arguably disingenuous posture lies in its potential to allow a rhetorical separation between the worlds of the saint and of her persecutor.²²

With the martyr's characteristic disdain for worldly possessions and honours, Catherine does not seek control of people and territory in the manner that Maxence does. Rather, the space which concerns her is the afterlife, a concern shared with the terrified Christians ordered by Maxence to make sacrifices to his gods. These gods are vital to understanding the difference between the faiths of Maxence and Catherine. While Maxence stresses the Roman origin of his worship of the sun and moon, Catherine makes no specific claims for the location of her god; her awareness of the material world is shaped by her view of it as God's creation, in which all things are transient. Her conversion is a shift from belief in material causes and their equally material effects to faith in a divine originating cause bringing about the existence of all things. As such, the 'kingdom' with which she identifies is a pure, inconceivable space, whose threshold is death and its bounty infinite and eternal. This relationship between finite, measurable place and the capacity of God and the followers of Christ to exceed it is clearly demonstrated in the figure of Catherine herself. Maxence makes several attempts to constrain, isolate, or bend her to his will, but none are successful; when he imprisons and starves her, she is visited and fed by angels (and Maxence's wife, whom Catherine claims has been sent to her by God), and an angel intervenes to break the wheels upon which the saint was to be tortured to either submission or death:

Les roes prist a turneier;
 Unc n'i remest raiol entier.
 Il les escust par tel air,
 Que *unc jointure nes pot tenir*.
 Par ces renga si curre les fist,

²¹ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne views Clemence's portrayal of Maxence's beliefs as unusually measured for a piece of hagiographic writing: 'The emperor Maxence and his fifty philosophers are initially presented not as 'heathen dogs' or 'mad wolves' (as in for instance the Early Middle English *Seinte Katerine*), but as holding beliefs culturally normative for them, so that the subsequent exposure of pagan culture and the psychopathology of secular power is unusually convincing and intellectually nuanced.' ('Clerc u lai, muine u dame,' p. 67).

²² Bernau argues that this opposition can be read as a structuring tool used by medieval Christians to map out the distinctions between themselves and their enemies: 'the ideological power of the hagiographical genre lies in its lack of specificity when presenting the enemies of Christ and the Christian community.' (Bernau, 'A Christian Corpus', p. 124).

Que quatre mil humes en ocist
 De cels ki la erent venu
 Pur escarnir la Deu vertu. (ll. 2105-12, emphasis mine)

[The angel] began to turn the wheels; there was not one spoke left unbroken. He shook them with such force that *there was no joint that could keep them together*. He sent them flying through the crowd at such speed that four thousand men were killed from those who had come to mock the power of God.

Prior to this vivid description, a sycophantic ‘vassal [...] ki d’engin d’Enimi plein fu’ (ll. 2009-10) proposes building great spiked wheels, and describes them in some detail (ll. 2015-50). Seen in conjunction with the scene above, where Maxence’s desire for conformity by any means rebounds on his people, both the architect and the narrator underline the very ‘constructed-ness’ of Maxence’s torture devices. Their worth lies in their instrumental value to the king, who seeks publicly to reaffirm his rule and regain the power he previously had over the Christians. Yet this attention to the instrumental functions of objects can also be extended to the people using them. The vassal’s cunning is not his own but the devil’s, and the angel’s actions are a demonstration of ‘la Deu vertu’. Unlike the other overtly constructed work to which I have referred – Clemence’s text – the wheels are shown to be no more than the sum of their parts, and the atomization of these tools of the emperor’s authority stands in contrast with the unbreakable body of the saint. Maxence’s attempts to impose his public rule over all bodies in his kingdom are subverted, as the saint, to whom the definition of place does not seem to matter terribly much, is able to summon a force greater than the king.

Catherine’s exposure of Maxence’s failure to control the places he inhabits and claims as his own is not limited to the public sphere. The conversion of Maxence’s wife and his confidant Porphire while he is away from the city demonstrates his failure to maintain control over his own household when he is not present. If he is unable to compel his wife to obey him, even under threat of torture, he cannot hope to control the rest of his subjects, and this breakdown of the domestic relationship finally triggers Maxence’s collapse into contradiction. He does not want to kill his wife, but the only way he can conceive of clinging to power is by treating her as brutally as the other Christians. By pushing him into enforcing his laws against his will, Catherine demonstrates the fragility of Maxence’s authority, as both his actions and their consequences are beyond his control.

Perhaps the clearest example of Maxence's failure to command the places of his rule and the objects within them is his treatment of the Christian martyrs' bodies. In accordance with traditional Roman burial practices their bodies are taken outside the city, but he orders that they should not be buried.²³ However, his various victims – first the philosophers, then the queen – are buried in secret by the Christians. Their trespassing of the city walls demonstrates that Maxence's power does not extend beyond them; in fact, his sphere of influence seems to contract as the narrative progresses and the work of the saint extends the influence of Christianity. This reaches its climax in the treatment of Catherine's own body. Her submission to execution might, in different circumstances, be read as proof of Maxence's mastery over her, but her instruction to the executioner makes clear that she is on the threshold of what she most desires. Catherine's last words evoke both the ossified will of the emperor and her own triumph over him, reminding her executioner and the audience that the emperor's wishes have been thwarted:

'Ami', fait ele al mal serjant,
 'Fai la volenté al tyrant.
 Ne seez ore pereçus,
 Kar ja m'apele le mien espus.' (ll. 2613-16)

'My friend', she said to the wicked guard, 'do the tyrant's bidding. Do not be afraid, for now my husband is calling me.'

Having failed to make Catherine his wife, Maxence's wish to eliminate Christianity's challenge to his authority is subverted by the Christian's command to the executioner; in seeking to impose his authority he has only undermined it. The miracles following her death go further towards indicating her non-conformity with various sets of physical laws. She bleeds milk, a property whereby she does nonetheless conform to one of the characteristics of virgin martyr lives.²⁴ Her body is lifted up by angels and taken to Mount

²³ On the Romans' treatment of the Martyrs of Lyons to demonstrate their concerns about the disposal of bodies of Christians and the fear of their resurrection, see Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 248-9. On the exclusion of the dead from urban spaces in the wider late- and post-Roman world, see Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: SCM Press, 1981), and Patrick J. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 166-7.

²⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), pp. 93-114.

Sinai, whose Biblical associations reinforce her privileged position as receiver of the word of God:

Encore i gist a icest jur,
 U Deus meint miracle ad ovré
 E fait e fra tut nostre eé.
 E del sepulcre u ele gist,
 Encore a cest jur oile en ist.
 Par icel olie sunt sané
 Plusur de lur enfermeté,
 Al loenge le criatur,
 Pur qui suffri mortel dudur.
 A sa mort repairier vulum,
 Kar sa feste ore vus dirum.
 Vint e cinc jurz dedenz novembre
 Suffri mort sun bel cors tendre.
 Mort suffri par un vendresdi
 A l'ore que Deus la suffri,
 Ki par sa mort nus ad salvé,
 S'il nus est a volenté. (ll. 2630-46)

[Her body] lies there to this day, and God has worked many miracles there, and continues and will continue to do so for the rest of our age. And to this day oil issues from her tomb. Many are cured of their illnesses by this oil, in the praise of the creator, for whom she suffered mortal pain. We want to return to her death, for we now speak of her feast day. On the twenty-fifth day of November her beautiful gentle body suffered death. She was put to death on a Friday, at the same time as God suffered it, who through his death has saved us, if we wish to be saved.

The elevation of Catherine's suffering and death to replicate those of Jesus marks her shift from mortal confinement to heavenly expansion, while the miraculous powers of her body establish her as a conduit for divine favour. This sacred location – on a mountain in the desert – necessitates arduous pilgrimage during which the faithful shadow the saint's soul's ascent to heaven.²⁵ The saint's transplantation into the Christian calendar means that both the object of remembrance – her body itself – and the act of remembering it have become points of reference to those who follow her cult from the fourth century to

²⁵ It is worth noting that several medieval chapels in England dedicated to Saint Catherine were built on elevated sites, enabling pilgrims to these shrines to share (after a fashion) the same physical experience as those ascending to the monastery on Mount Sinai. See Katherine J. Lewis, 'Pilgrimage and the Cult of St Katherine in Late Medieval England', in *St Katherine of Alexandria: Texts and Contexts in Western Medieval Europe*, ed. by Katherine J. Lewis and Jacqueline Jenkins, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 37-52 (pp. 46-47).

the twelfth. Although the saint rejects localization or specificity in the text, she becomes a stable point of coherence in the construction of communities, leading pilgrims to a lawless place beyond the city where they may approach the favour of God and experience a tangible connection with heaven through the honouring of Christian martyrs.

4. Manufacturing authority: statues and idols

In exceeding the limitations of the body while at the same time maintaining power through the very materiality of her body's resistance to the tortures of her opponents, Catherine continues to push back the rule of figures like Maxence, whose authority is dependent upon the display and manipulations of symbols of power.²⁶ Despite the prominence accorded these images by Maxence, they ultimately work against him, as Catherine subverts them by representing them merely as manufactured objects in a meaningless order. Of all the offers Maxence makes to Catherine to induce her to give up her opposition to him and his laws, perhaps the most striking are the proposals to grant her autonomous power within his household and to have statues constructed in her honour. We might see these bargaining tools as complementary to one another, since both imply a permanent and specific place for her within his domain, and they suggest a progressive intensification of Maxence's desire to dominate Catherine. Furthermore, this maneuvering, which can be seen as both a political and seductive strategy (when viewed in the context of his repeated compliments on her beauty and subsequent offer of marriage after killing his wife), is a strategy for his own survival:

'Secunde en mun palais seras.
Tu avras après la reine
De tut mun regne la saisine,
Fors sulement de sun duaie,
Dunt jo ne li voil pas tort faire.' (ll. 1268-72)

'You will be the second most powerful person in my palace. After the queen, you will have power over all of my kingdom, apart from her own allowance, a matter in which I do not wish to wrong her.'

²⁶ See Bynum on the resistance to containment of certain types of body, particularly the remains of female saints: 'in death it [the body of the holy woman] could be protected from putrefaction (i.e., giving birth to worms) by the presence of its soul in paradise. Thus closed to ordinary excretions, it might produce extraordinary effluvia (miraculous lactations, stigmatic bleeding, sweet oil and manna from graves) that cured diseases and assuaged pain.' (*The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 221).

This offer foreshadows Maxence's later proposal, and is an early indicator of his reign's collapse into disorder. Here he claims to be obliged to respect his wife's rights regarding her property, but her torture and execution – and his refusal to grant her a burial – imply that through trying to maintain order he has become responsible for its opposite. He also offers Catherine the authority to promote her own favourites in his court, through which he endows her with near-God-like powers to judge:

'Cels qu'en curt voldras honurer,
 Bien se purrunt d'onur vanter,
 E cels que voldras abaissier
 Ne purra nuls huem essalcier.' (ll. 1275-78)

'Those at court whom you wish to favour may truly boast of it, and those whom you wish to bring low may not be praised by anyone.'

These lines anticipate Maxence's later conflict between will and power, but in devolving this authority to Catherine he grants her a freedom of will which is eventually denied to the emperor himself. It is difficult to see exactly where he situates himself in relation to Catherine in this scenario; does he imagine himself as exempt from the judgment of his newly-appointed courtier, or is he to be subject to the whims of the 'bele pulcele' who, in her freedom to exalt or destroy as she chooses, increasingly resembles Fortune, a force beyond the control of any mortal (and who, like Catherine, is typically represented in visual sources as holding a wheel)?²⁷ Ironically, Catherine has no desire to exercise her own will beyond submitting to the will of God and consenting to become a tool for the promotion of the Christian faith. She is not compelled to be a Christian, but rather chooses it, while Maxence damns himself to killing his beloved wife through his desperation to hang on to power; this will to act has become disembodied from the emperor and reformulated as a compulsion to act, which is the opposite to Catherine's freedom to renounce her place in the world.²⁸ We might then conclude that in his

²⁷ Bernau explores the notion of Catherine as a figure representing ideals of discipline and order in late medieval educational theory (Bernau, 'A Christian Corpus', p. 119). The iconography of pedagogy is alluded to again in the proposed statue of Catherine, which will, like Boethius's Lady Philosophy, carry a sceptre. Louis Réau meanwhile indicates the range of interpretations of the wheel (which is her most common attribute in visual representations), seeing it both as an emblem of the celestial sphere, but also as the ring signifying her marriage to Christ. Réau, *L'iconographie de l'art chrétien*, 3 vols (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), III, 265-66.

²⁸ The distinction between compulsion and free will is evoked by Catherine in her debate with the philosophers, in which she argues that God underwent incarnation and death by choice and out of love, not

attempt to demonstrate his authority through consenting to someone else's freedom he is destined to fail, since his own freedom is an illusion.

Maxence's close attention to the relationship between place and power is evident from the first encounter in the temple, where he is described as being 'en halt seoir / Sur tuz les autres apareir' (ll. 195-96: seated on high, appearing above all the others). By elevating Catherine to a position close to his own he unknowingly foreshadows the queen's dream, though where Christ gives Catherine the crown in the dream, emphasizing her role as intercessor, Maxence seems to make her a god in her own right. This god-like power more closely resembles that of a classical deity, whose will is expressed by subjecting mortals to its whims, than the evolving Christian notion of God as an arbiter whose judgment is based on the sum of people's deeds and the penance they do for them.²⁹ In comparison with Peter Brown's analysis of the early Christian perception of God as exercising powers similar to those of an emperor including clemency, Maxence's offering Catherine a position of power appears as an emphatic valorization of imperial privilege. This is also, ironically, a weakening of his own position, which recalls Urban's offers to recast the idols in Christina's temple-prison. Maxence's act of establishing a new power centre for Catherine concurrent with his own has the potential to be repeated again and again, in the same manner that the statues he wants to erect can be made and remade *ad infinitum*.³⁰

The spectre of Maxence's faith also lurks in the plan to commemorate Catherine with statues, a gesture approaching idolatry. Prominent though the material artefacts of polytheistic practices are in other martyr lives, they are relatively unimportant in Catherine. The temple is the site of the initial dialogue between the saint and the emperor, but the objects themselves do not have any real dramatic function in the way

because of obligation. This point is reiterated by Clemence in the epilogue: 'Il meime devint criature / Par sa bunté, nient par nature' (ll. 2653-4: He took human form out of goodness, not out of necessity). On the influence of Anselm of Canterbury's writings on the incarnation on Clemence's text see Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture c.1150-1300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 232-43; Duncan Robertson, 'Writing the Textual Community: Clemence of Barking's Life of St. Catherine', *French Forum*, 21.1 (1996), 5-28; Kay, *Courtly Contradictions*, pp. 127-30.

²⁹ Peter Brown, 'The Decline of the Empire of God: Amnesty, Penance and the Afterlife from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages', in *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), pp. 41-59.

³⁰ On the significance of the image of the re-formed statue as a metaphor for bodily resurrection in medieval thought see Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*.

they do in, for example, the *Vie de sainte Cristine*, in which the saint vandalizes the temple of Apollo and makes statues move as if they were puppets. However, I believe allusion to artifice in the service of Maxence's faith is a significant indicator to the text's concern with systems of enclosure and domination. He appeals to the same qualities that are noted by others in Catherine, namely her beauty and royal birth, and there is a hint towards veneration in such comments as 'A ta belté n'est cumparee / Femme mortal k'al mund seit nee' (ll. 1249-50: 'No mortal woman ever born could compare to you in beauty'). She is set apart from the order of mortality, verbally recast as a lyric *domna*, and through this admittedly formulaic literary allusion he arguably sees her cruelty towards him as being motivated by art rather than ideology.³¹ Such a view might be supported by his desire to have her immortalized in stone and metal, which hints at a longing for stability and preservation, both of himself and of the things he values. He laments her dismissal of 'la nostre dreite sente' (l. 1254) and 'noz deus' (l. 1259), and pleads with her to adopt his beliefs and make sacrifices to 'our gods'. His claiming of collective ownership of these gods is quite distinct from the manner in which Catherine talks about God; both Maxence and Catherine define themselves by their faith, but while Maxence's 'noz' refers to a diminishing proportion of the population as the saint's passion unfolds, the community of martyrs surrenders itself to life beyond death. Catherine, on the other hand, most frequently refers to her God simply as 'Deu', whose freedom from being claimed by any one family or nation shatters the connection Maxence makes between imperial power and traditional religion.³² It is only beyond death that the ideal community can take shape, but Maxence's refusal to submit to any other authority places him definitively and catastrophically outside of any community other than that of his dead ancestors.

His commitment to material commemoration is most palpable in his offer to erect statues of her in his palace and his temple:

³¹ Robertson comments on Maxence's distraught and contradictory speech on sentencing his wife to death and condemnation of courtly love by Catherine in her words of encouragement to the queen, aligning the king with Thomas' Tristan and the saint with Bernard of Clairvaux's 'redirection of love to its divine source.' (Robertson, p. 22). See also Batt, 'Clemence of Barking's Transformations', p. 114.

³² However, there is also a striking contrast between Catherine's speeches on the salvation of the world and the narrator's closing comments on our salvation; the possessives which extend participation in salvation cannot apply equally to martyrs and the readers of this text, but they can be shared between the audience and the narrator. On hagiography's interpellation of faith communities, see Campbell, *Medieval Saints' Lives*, pp. 121-48.

'Une ymagene frai tresgeter;
 En tun nun la frai honurer.
 En mi mun palais esterra,
 Un bel ceptre en sa mein tendra,
 E tuz icels ki la verrunt
 Humblement la saluerunt.
 E s'il i ad nul si osé,
 Ki senz salu i ait passé,
 Pur culpable serad tenu
 Cume cil ki mun mal ad vulu.
 Ja nul n'i avera tant forfait
 Pur quei merci crié li ait,
 Que tost ne li seit parduné,
 Si parfunt li ad encliné.
 Encore te frai jo greinur honor
 Que nuls ne puet faire greinur.
 Estre mes altres pramesses,
 Entre les temples as dewesses
 Te frai un de marbre en tun nun;
 Unches plus riche ne vit hum.' (ll. 1281-1300)

'I will have a statue made; I will have it honoured in your name. It will be placed in the middle of my palace, holding a grand sceptre in its hand, and all who see it will humbly bow to it. And if there are any so bold as to pass it without greeting it, they will be held as guilty as if they had wished evil on me. All crimes, however severe, would be pardoned if their perpetrators bowed down to it. I will do you an even greater honour, which could never be surpassed. Among my other promises, among the temples of the goddesses I will have one made in marble in your name; none will ever see one more lavish.'

The idolatrous overtones in this proposal are plain, and it is perhaps ironic that this gesture, which makes the living Catherine an intermediary between divine and human realms by means of placing her image among those of goddesses, is similar to the intermediary role filled by the saint in both life and death. Her reward for obedience to Maxence's law will be transformation into a licit symbol consistent with the 'official' order of his realm; once again, this attempt to regulate his kingdom and subjects through the manipulation of material symbols fails, as his intentions are subsumed within the will of God. His 'Pygmalion-in-reverse' act of creating an image of a desired living person is a strategy for fixing her within the material order, but this only serves to underline the difference between Catherine's and Maxence's conception of immortality.³³ The statue

³³ Michael Camille's reading of iconographic representation of the Pygmalion story in manuscripts of the *Roman de la Rose* reflects an ekphrastic reclamation of 'profane' art in secular narrative; while the *Vie de sainte Catherine* does not endorse veneration of the material object, it does however carry a sense of what

may wield a symbol of power, but, as Catherine herself indicates in her first defiant speech to the emperor, it will have no power or will of its own:

‘Ço que aures, home le fist;
Membres e cors sen sens i mist.
Oir ne poent ne veer,
De mal ne de bien n’unt poeir.
Il ne funt bien a lur ami
Ne nul mal a lur enimi.
E tu les aores humlement.
Di mei pur quei, kar ne l’entent.’ (ll. 211-18)

‘[The gods] you worship were made by man; their limbs and bodies have no feeling. They cannot hear or see, they have no power to do right or wrong. They neither do good to their friend nor bad to their enemy. And humbly you worship them. Tell me why, because I don’t understand it.’

The emperor unwittingly demonstrates the limitations of his gods by implying that he, a mortal, can create a new deity. Maxence’s placing each of these statues in a location associated with his personal and political authority further confirms his desire to cement his political and religious authority. Yet while he desires total control of the public life of his kingdom, his dramatic and terrifying encounter with the saint locates him firmly within the purview of God’s judgment. Maxence’s tragedy is his dawning realization that he is as much a subject of divine, quasi-imperial forces as those who willingly kneel before his executioners.

Catherine’s angry response to the offer of the statues returns to the corruptible nature of the material world and those who worship it:

‘Ohi, com ore sui boneuree
Quant jo serai en or muee!
Un’ ymage avrai en mun nun,
Humblement me aurd l’um.
Tute serai d’or tresgetee
E come dewesse aoree.
[...]
Un cors li purras tresgeter,

Camille sees as a restructuring of claims to authority, an issue of particular interest in this female-authored text: ‘placing the lady on her pedestal involved another transference of power – in addition to her own loss of power in becoming a passive image – that of male “art” to mold and moreover, to manipulate inherited material. *Clergie* no longer control and contain all knowledge in the domain of the Latin Logos, for a new knowledge, that of the *poete*, provided an alternative.’ Camille, *The Gothic Idol*, pp. 336-37.

Mais vie ne li poez duner.
 Or le me di, se tu le sez dire,
 Dunt est e quele est la matyre,
 Ki les mortels cors vivifie
 E dune veue e oie,
 Qu'il poent parler e oir,
 Aler, veer e sentir.
 Si ma ymage iço nen ad,
 Sun cors certes petit valdra.
 Poi li valdra sun saveir,
 Quant oir ne puet ne parler.
 Ore respundras par aventure:
 Grant gloire m'iert cest stature,
 Ki en mun nun serad furmee,
 E de ta maisnie aoree.
 Ohi, quel honur me ferunt
 Quant tel loenge me dirrunt!
 "Iço est Katerine ci,
 Ki sun Deu e sa lei guerpi."
 Reis, d'itel honur ne m'en chalt,
 Kar icest los un blasme valt. (ll. 1305-10, 1317-38)

'Oh, how happy I am that I will be turned into gold! I will have a statue in my name, and men will humbly worship me. I will be made entirely in gold, and adored like a goddess. [...] You can give it a body, but you cannot give it life. Now tell me, if you are able, whence and what is the matter that gives mortal bodies life, vision and hearing so that they may speak and hear, move, see and feel. If my statue has none of these, its body will have little worth. Knowledge will be of no use to it when it cannot hear or speak. Now you might reply that I will have great glory in this statue, which will be made in my name, and worshipped by your household. Oh, what honour I will have when they speak such praise of me! "This is Catherine, who deserted her God and faith." King, I see no worth in this honour, for such praise is condemnation.

The saint's sarcastic opening remark draws attention to the process of constructing her statue, comparable with the construction of the wheels, while her subsequent mock debate (within which she plays the parts of herself and of Maxence) explores the nature of creation and sentient life. In proposing imitation of nature in material form, the king makes himself a feeble imitation of a creator god; he is opposed implicitly to the modest author of the saint's life who accepts that her work, though fit for her current audience, will need to be re-made again as the audience changes in order to best communicate the glory of God and his saints. Catherine shows an awareness that, in being made 'immortal' through art, she would lose the ability to judge and act upon her own will, anticipating how others will look at her statue and judge her. As a contrived object, she would be

permanently divided from her true creator with whom she longs for a vital union, and would be nothing more than a decaying symbol of infidelity in Maxence's anachronistic regime.

5. *Voleir* and *poeir*

The ability of women to induce men to act against their own will is a recurring theme in Old French literature, and this particular brand of feminine cunning is a feature of characters ranging from the lecherous wives and daughters of the fabliaux to the untouchable courtly ladies of the lyric tradition. Catherine, however, does not seem to fit either of these feminine stereotypes, since she neither stands to gain anything by Maxence's fall nor seeks any sadistic pleasure in her hold over him. As I have argued above, it is possible to read Maxence's relationship to Catherine as being structured (by him) along the lines of the unattainable lady and her suitor; it almost seems as if he knows he cannot – must not – possess her, and acknowledges that she is more of a threat to him than he is to her. For the saint, the emperor stands as a point of pure opposition, an irruption into the God-given order guaranteed by the Incarnation. Catherine's battle with Maxence is not intended to literally overthrow him but to diminish his authority through proving the vanity of his claim to rule and the insubstantiality of his religion. Her initial victories over the emperor himself and then the philosophers serve to unsettle him and confirm his desire to close down any opportunities she might have to win more martyrs for her cause. His offer to promote her in his court is a mirror to her victory in promoting others for martyrdom; he wants to give her power on his own terms to prevent her from exercising her own power in ways he cannot control. His subsequent imprisonment of her makes sense in this context of regulated liberty, since the denial of her communication with others should stem the flow of his citizens towards the spectacle of the martyr's death as surely as starving her will reduce her to a state in which she is physically unable to resist him. Nevertheless, the clearest demonstration of his limitations is his failure to maintain these conditions and to prevent his wife from making contact with her.³⁴ Maxence's anguished speech on his wife's fate conveys that more has

³⁴ 'Seen in relation to the narrative structures that saints' lives take such pains to construct, the function of marriage is to incorporate and overcome such particularities [i.e., gender and social position] by locating them within a system in which the only relationship that matters is an inherently excessive, transgressive

been lost here than his marriage; his very will to impose himself through his law has trapped him into forfeiting his desire in the name of survival.

This speech expresses the impossible situation in which Maxence finds himself, as he analyzes his thwarted desire. Besides the embarrassment caused by the conversion of his wife and one of his most trusted courtiers, he is exposed as being caught between what he most wishes to do, and what he must do to maintain the illusion of his authority. The opening lines suggest grief at his wife's loss of faith in his gods, and he portrays her as a victim:

'Reine, fait il, ço que deit,
Que si paroles encuntre dreit?
Crestien te unt ensorceree,
Kar tu es tute enfantomee.
Tute ma honor ai ore perdue,
Quant il t'unt si deceue.' (ll. 2165-70)

'My queen,' he said, 'what should I do when you speak against what is right?
The Christians have bewitched you, for you have completely lost your mind. I
have now lost all that I had, since they have so deceived you.'

He sees the queen as having been acted upon and cast into a psychological disorder, mirroring his consistent view of Christianity as a creed cruel to its believers and nonsensical in its insistence upon a god assuming mortal form:

'N'est nule merveille greinur
Ne nule plus horrible errur,
Que vus dites que Jhesu Crist
Nostre mortel charn el mund prist
[...]
Içest' errur ne vus suffit,
Ainz avez noz deis en despit
Ki nun mortel sunt e serrunt
E tuz jurz sen fin remeindrunt.' (ll. 237-40, 247-50)

'There is no more error more shocking or dreadful than what you say about
Jesus Christ taking on our mortal body in this world [...] This folly is not

and potentially queer relationship of faith. [...] Hagiography does not advocate the reorganization of human kinship; rather, it requires human kinship to remain the inferior alternative to spiritual alliance, thereby excluding that which materially obstructs the unimpeded flow of desire towards the divine.' Campbell, *Medieval Saints' Lives*, pp. 115-16.

enough for you, for you scorn our gods, who are not and never will be mortal,
and will endure for all time without end.'

Maxence's description of the eternal life of his gods is strikingly similar to the accession to eternity of the Christian faithful, which Catherine describes on several occasions in the narrative. His characterization of the Christians as disordered is ironic, since their disobedience towards his laws and their deaths at his command highlight the increasing disorder of his own authority. Though still standing at the end of the narrative, he is condemned to a death-like impotence, as the carrying-out of his orders only serves to increase the number of martyrs and, consequently, the population of heaven. This refusal to contradict his own will to absolute power points up the contrast between him and the God he denies, and he 'becomes part of a contrastive Anselmian analysis of the disordered will alongside the properly disposed one of Clemence's saint.'³⁵ Ultimately, Catherine's triumph and salvation are assured by her declining to exercise her individual will, submitting instead to the will and power of God which guarantee her spiritual survival beyond death. The loss of his 'honour' (l. 2169), implying loss of both esteem and his territorial possessions, signifies his awareness of how he appears to others, and the full cost of his unbending rule becomes clear as he tries to justify what he is about to do:

'Jo en serrai mult avilé
E des miens le meins reduté,
Que ma femme issi me hunist
E pur tel folur me guerpist,
[...]
Ces altres dames, que ferunt?
Par fei, a li essample prendrunt,
Si enganerunt lur segnurs,
Qu'il crerrunt en ces errurs.
De dous mals deit l'um al mielz traire.
Mielz m'avient justise faire,
Que pur la folie de li
Seit tut le mien regne peri.' (ll. 2219-22, 2233-40)

'I will be greatly dishonoured in this, and less feared by my people, for my wife has so shamed me and left me for such madness. [...] What will these other women do? In truth, they will follow her example and trick their lords into believing such folly. Man must make the most of these sweet pains. It

³⁵ Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture*, p. 238.

will be better for me to have justice done than see my kingdom fail for the sake of her foolishness.'

He tries to convince himself that by killing the queen he will be acting in the common interest, perpetuating the image of Christianity as a virus which can be contained by eliminating its carriers. In so doing, he will also guarantee the security of his own position and the coherence of his laws, with a concern for continuity similar to that which we have seen in the representation of his understanding of his gods. However, this measure comes at considerable personal cost, and it is in this grief that his determination to persevere is undercut with a sense of desperate fatalism:

Poi me valdra puis mun poeir,
 Quant perdu avrai mun voleir;
 Kar desque mun voleir me faut,
 De ceo ke ne voil, mei ke chaut?
 Quel joie purrai jo avoir
 De puissance cuntre voleir?
 Las, tut puis ceo ke ne ruis,
 Et ceo ke plus voil, pas ne puis.
 Cuntre voleir poeir acoil,
 Mais cest voleir senz poeir doil.
 Car si jo en usse poissance,
 Dunc fust fenie ma grevance.
 Ore ne sai jo a quel fin traire,
 Quant jo mun voleir ne pois faire.' (ll. 2203-16)

'My power will mean little to me when I will have lost my will, for when my will fails, what I do not want means nothing to me. What joy could I have in power which is contrary to desire? Wretch that I am, I can do everything I do not want to do, and what I want the most I cannot do. I gain power which is contrary to desire, but this powerless desire pains me. For if I had the power [to do as I desire] my grieving would be over. Now I do not know which way to turn, since I cannot do as I wish.'

Despite having seemed sure of his course of action early in this speech (l. 2173: 'Laissier ne pois que ne t'ocie', literally 'I cannot allow that I do not kill you'), this incompatibility of his desire with what he is capable of doing is emblematic of the division within Maxence himself, and this is reflected in turn in the turmoil of his kingdom. In this line he formulates his future action in terms of not being permitted to not do something, which hints at his seeing himself as a victim at the same time as recognizing that he has become an agent without any personal will to act. The queen comes to resemble Agamben's

'homo sacer', a being who can be lawfully killed but not sacrificed. Agamben's reference to 'patria potestas', the Roman legal right of fathers over the lives of their sons, is particularly pertinent in analysis of this episode, as he places it at the crossing point between domestic and public spheres:

If classical politics is born through the separation of these two spheres, life that may be killed but not sacrificed is the hinge on which each sphere is articulated and the threshold at which the two spheres are joined in becoming indeterminate. Neither political *bios* nor natural *zoē*, sacred life is the zone of indistinction in which *zoē* and *bios* constitute each other in including and excluding each other.³⁶

Maxence's speech has been commented on as evidence for Clemence's inclination towards courtly themes in spite of (or in conjunction with) her devotional subject matter, and Duncan Robertson notes similarities between Maxence's desperation in this scene and Tristan's frustration in his marriage to Iseut of the White Hands.³⁷ However, Maxence's defeat is the result of an inversion of Tristan's situation, and he himself becomes the outlaw who cannot impose himself on the order which excludes him. While Tristan is condemned to a loveless marriage, Maxence is forced into killing a wife he seems to love deeply in order to preserve himself in his position as king. Robertson argues that this linguistic parallel both invites sympathy with Maxence (through the implied comparison with a chivalric hero) and, when seen in the wider context of the *Vie*, underlines the author's condemnation of courtly love, as her text repeatedly privileges a divine union modelled on secular marriage over marital love between mortals.

We could push this reading further and view the speech as a subtly merciful gesture on the part of the author, as she grants him a moment of humanity in which he is confronted with the horror of his own impotence. Mercy is, critically, a faculty lacking in Maxence, and is one which highlights the limits of his powers, since clemency requires that the judge be above his own laws. Maxence's methods of establishing and prosecuting his laws demonstrate his tyrannical nature, a subject considered earlier in the twelfth century by John of Salisbury. John's criticisms of regal abuse of power, expressed most fully in his *Policraticus* (1156-59), could have plausibly been known to the educated and

³⁶ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 90.

³⁷ Robertson, pp.20-21. See also Legge, p.71, and William Macbain, 'Five Old French Renderings of the *Passio sancte Katerine virginis*,' in *Medieval Translators and their Craft*, ed. Jeanette Beer (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989), pp. 41-65.

well-connected nuns of Barking, and this may be taken as another example of how the author builds herself a presence in the text.³⁸ *Policraticus* observes how the ideal ruler, who is 'the public power and a certain image on earth of the divine majesty', should judge his subjects:

Meditatur ergo iugiter sapientiam et de ea sic iustitiam operatur quod lex clementiae semper est in lingua eius. Et sic clementiam temperat rigore iustitiae quod lingua eius iudicium loquitur. [...] Honor etenim regis iudicium diligit et delinquentium culpas tranquilla mentis moderatione compescit. (4. 8)

(The prince must [...] perpetually meditate on wisdom, and on the basis of it he must perform justice, although the law of mercy is always to be upon his tongue; and this mercy will temper the vigour of justice, although his tongue will pronounce just judgment. [...] For indeed the honour of the king esteems justice and restricts the faults of wrongdoers with tranquil moderation of mind.)

This is a model for leadership which the author herself imitates, producing a work which, in its totality, is a subtle exemplar of secular justice exercised according to the will of God, but tempered with the divine attribute of mercy.

In addition to these elements, the tension between *voleir* and *poeir* in this speech brings to the fore the difficulty Maxence experiences as he attempts to determine his place in both geographical and historical terms. To explain this, we must return to Catherine's voicing of her opposition to the pre-Christian values and beliefs embodied in Maxence and his fifty philosophers, prior to the philosophers' conversion. In her account of her own conversion, she depicts a transition from the classical-philosophical understanding of the world to an understanding based on faith:

'Certes tun sen pris jo petit
E mult l'ai jo pois preisié poi

³⁸ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus: Of the Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers*, ed. and trans. by Cary J. Nederman, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). On the culture of Latinity and literacy at Barking, see A. I. Doyle, 'Books Connected With the Vere Family and Barking Abbey', *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society* 25 (1958), 222-43; Wogan-Browne, 'Clerc u lai', p. 67; Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2 vols, second edition (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933, repr. 1937), I, pp. 164-67, 381-85. While there is no clear evidence that the *Policraticus* was read in convents, Peter von Moos' observation that it was frequently used as a source of *exempla* might be a tangential connection to the work of communities as prolific as that of Barking. Von Moos, 'The Use of Exempla in the *Policraticus*', in *The World of John of Salisbury*, ed. By Michael Wilks (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), pp. 207-62 (pp. 211-15).

Que mun Deu conuistre soi.
 Pois que jo oi parler de li,
 Tutes voz falses arz guerpi
 Des queles ere ainz si sage
 Que el monde n'oi per de mun eage.' (ll. 686-92)

'I have little care for your learning, and have not had much interest in it since I have known my God. When I heard talk of him, I abandoned all your false arts, in which I was so wise that I had no equal of my age in the world.'

Setting aside the claims Catherine makes for her own capabilities in this statement (and the disingenuity of her skilled rhetorical performance), she represents Christianity as an escape from 'falses arz' through divine revelation. However, revelation is only a part of the mechanism of conversion. Throughout the narrative the role of the will is repeatedly emphasized by Catherine and the narrator. It is not enough to simply act in the right way according to God; the Christian must also want to be saved, as the narrator argues in the epilogue:

Car nus poum bien Deu aveir,
 Se nus en avum bon voleir.
 Grant materie nus ad duné
 D'aveir bone volenté.
 Car nostre amur tant desira,
 Que tute rien pur nus cria. (ll. 2647-52)

For we can truly have God, if our will is good. He has given us the great faculty to wish for what is good. For he desired our love so much that he created all things for us.

Catherine's intentions and outcomes match up perfectly in the text, since her *voleir* and *poeir* are simultaneously derived from and directed towards God, and she is confident of reaching her ultimate goal of perfect union with her heavenly husband. Her willingness to surrender to what she claims is unquestionably correct stands in direct contradiction with the false security Maxence tries to obtain through stabilizing the human elements surrounding him, as the Christians' sole desire for death undermines his wish to dominate them. His victims' lack of fear constitutes their victory over him, even though they are about to die at his command. The shame he experiences results from his penalty's transformation into gesture of glory, a shift which mirrors the transformation his native city is undergoing in the background of the text; he proudly identifies himself as Roman in

his first dialogue with Catherine, but is powerless to influence the city he failed to conquer and make his own. Seemingly immune to revelation, his will is directed exclusively towards blocking or denying the desires of others, but this proves to be beyond him, as Catherine demonstrates in her instructions to her executioner (ll. 2613-16). The saint and readers alike are alert to the emptiness of Maxence's boast that his ancestors 'furent sume' (l. 234) in their faith, and he is to witness the reduction of his belief system to an archaic cult within the new order of the church of Christ. Catherine asserts at the end of the speech in which she explains the fall and resurrection, 'S'ore ne me creis, dunc as tu tort' (l. 1010: 'If you don't believe me now, then you are wrong'), and in so doing she anticipates the future dominance of her faith as well as closing down avenues for reply; for her, what has been revealed to her is so self-evidently correct that it does not require explanation. Maxence is always already defeated in this narrative, but it requires the intervention of the saint to define the era without end that will enclose 'ceste regne sultif et vein' (l. 2287: 'this deceitful and trivial kingdom').

Conclusion

In Clemence's interpretation of the story of Catherine of Alexandria, then, the focus would appear to be the containment of the saint's adversary rather than the suffering of the saint herself. In comparison with other martyr lives there are remarkably few lines devoted to the descriptions of torture. It is this attention to place and the use of narrative to define its boundaries which makes the author-narrator such a subtly powerful presence in the text. Clemence's ability to shift position to identify with the saint and the audience mirrors her treatment of the late imperial Roman context. By setting the scene with an account of Constantine's birth and reign, she establishes Maxence's archaism in a much broader context than that evoked by Gautier in the alliance he sets up between Christina's father and the ferociously anti-Christian emperor. This attention to context is mirrored in the geographical setting. For a twelfth-century audience consuming the literature of the Crusades alongside newly available vernacular hagiography, Alexandria's exoticism and strategically important port places it on a map of the maritime region of the wider Mediterranean and locates geographically the city's proud history of intellectual activity. It is, nevertheless, a city perceived as standing on a

threshold of the mastered world. William of Tyre describes Alexandria as lying 'on the border between the cultivated land and the arid desert. Beyond the walls of the city and closely adjoining it on the west lies a vast waste which has never felt the blessings of cultivation and care' (William of Tyre, II, p. 335). This proximity to unsettled space further hems in Maxence; he is caught within a network of topographic and historical forces, and is ultimately a footnote to the narrative of Christianity's spread around the Mediterranean.

Chapter 4

The limits of knowledge and the edge of the world: the *Voyage de saint Brendan*

L'élan de l'homme qui l'entraîne vers les îles reprend le double mouvement qui produit les îles en elles-mêmes. Rêver des îles, avec angoisse ou joie peu importe, c'est rêver qu'on se sépare, qu'on est déjà séparé, loin des continents, qu'on est seul et perdu – ou bien c'est rêver qu'on repart à zéro, qu'on recrée, qu'on recommence.¹

The human impulse which draws us towards islands comprises the double movement which produces the islands themselves. Whether sorrowfully or joyfully, to dream of islands is to dream of separation, of already being separated, of being alone and lost, far from the continental land-mass. Or else, it is to dream of starting from scratch, a re-creation, a new beginning.

Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of the imaginative potential of the desert island identifies two possible models for inhabitation. The inhabiting subject either abandons himself to the strangeness of the territory, or he appropriates and masters it after the forms and practices of the inhabited places he has left behind, exemplified for Deleuze in the form of Robinson Crusoe's bourgeois utopia. Benedeit's Anglo-Norman *Voyage de saint Brendan* (first quarter of the twelfth century), however, imagines the island of Paradise in a distinctly universal and eschatological sense. This island paradise is not a site for self-creation or reflection on distance from the 'continents', but a space in which time and change are non-existent. While the monks are not permitted to experience heaven in its all-absorbing entirety, they are left in no doubt that their ultimate journey will be the mirror to the final journey of all of the saved. We may find a more applicable reflection on the islands visited by Brendan, an abbot and church-builder of the sixth century, and his monks in Deleuze's comments on the uninhabitability of the island:

On s'étonnera toujours que l'Angleterre soit peuplée, l'homme ne peut vivre sur une île qu'en oubliant ce qu'elle représente. Les îles sont d'avant l'homme ou pour après.²

¹ Gilles Deleuze, 'Causes et raisons des îles désertes', in *L'Île déserte et autres textes. Textes et entretiens 1953-1974*, ed. by David Lapoujade, Paradoxe (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 2002), pp. 11-17 (p. 12).

Translation is my own.

² Deleuze, p. 12.

It never ceases to amaze that England is inhabited; man can only live on an island by forgetting what it represents. Islands are either from an age prior to man or for the one which follows him.

The ache of eternity which troubles his reading of the island space offers a new way of reading the relationship between the inhabited world to which Brendan temporarily returns and the paradise he has been partially shown. Unlike Arthur's Avalon, there will be no anticipated future journey back to the land of the living from the island of heaven. It truly marks the end of the world, and can only be left in the first instance because Brendan is not yet ready to experience it in its totality. He must return to the land of his birth before he can be fully welcomed into heaven. What man must forget in order for the island to be occupied, Deleuze suggests, is the island's temporal separation from human history. The notion of forgetting is an echo to the visit to the underworld in the *Roman d'Eneas*; Eneas, like Brendan, is allowed to return to the living without forgetting what he has seen. However, this knowledge is used to different ends by these two protagonists, and the spaces through which they pass hold different meanings. While the classically-inflected underworld is the domain of both beginnings and endings, of heirs and ancestors, for Brendan, born to a line of kings, heaven is the ultimate destination.

The *Voyage de saint Brendan* describes the journey of the sixth-century Irish abbot who sought the island of Paradise. After seeking the advice of Barintus, another abbot who had come close to the island, Brendan sets sail with a company of his monks, and they experience a series of enlightening and terrifying marvels whose function is to strengthen their faith in God. These include an island of enormous sheep, neutral angels transformed into birds, a whale upon whose back they land, and battling sea monsters. After seven years of cyclical journeying, the monks encounter Judas Iscariot, chained to a rock and dragged back and forth between two hells; Brendan intervenes to beg for one night's mercy for Judas, which is granted. As they near Paradise, they land on the island of Paul the Hermit, whose perfect health in extreme old age is attributed to the grace of God who placed him on this island. Finally, the monks reach Paradise, but are unable to experience its full bliss while still alive. Brendan is given stones from Paradise as a reminder of the joy which is to come, and returns to Ireland. He tells of his travels, which increases the piety of his audience, and dies three years after his return.

This chapter examines Benedeit's version of this legend in order to determine how the poet imagines the relationship between the narrative of the journey and the audiences within and without the text. The manner in which Brendan, and his relationships with others, is drawn distinguishes him both from the other saints of this study and from the impression of him in his Latin source, the eighth-century *Navigatio sancti Brendani*.³ The legend is influenced by secular literary traditions, and by reproducing it in one of the vernacular languages of spiritual biography this poem offers an entertaining combination of action adventure and theological reflection.⁴ The abbot's didactic and allegorizing interpretation of the journey recasts it as a narrateable experience – as opposed to Deleuze's forgetting or reproduction of the inhabited world – and strengthens the bond between himself and his young monks. I will argue that the text's treatment of place and mobility, and the ongoing work of the educator/storyteller, make it entirely appropriate to place it at the mid-point of this thesis.

1. Locating St Brendan

Brendan is unusual among the saintly and heroic protagonists considered in this study, as his journey is neither symptom nor cause of changes or splits in a community. His distance from the Mediterranean, the focus of the other poems (or, in the case of the *Roman de Brut*, the point of origin) also sets him apart, though the survival of versions of the legend in Catalan (fifteenth century), Occitan and Venetian (thirteenth century) testifies to its appeal in southern Europe.⁵ However, Ireland, the western edge of Christian Europe, is a location of contradictions in the medieval imagination. Officially

³ *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis from Early Latin Manuscripts*, ed. and trans. by Carl Selmer, Publications in Mediaeval Studies (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959); English translations are from John O'Meara and Jonathan M. Wooding's version in *The Voyage of Saint Brendan: Representative Versions of the Legend in English Translation*, ed. by W. R. J. Barron and Glyn S. Burgess (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002)

⁴ The cross-genre reach of the *Voyage* is evidenced by the manuscript context; while it typically appears alongside other material concerning saints, it also accompanies anthologies of material on natural sciences. Meanwhile, the influences of both Latin and Celtic traditions upon Benedeit's poem are brought out in its being placed alongside fables by Marie de France in the compilation York, Minster Library and Archives, XVI, K. 12 (I): '[the scribe] copies Benedeit's *Brendan* after the *Fables* of Marie de France and seems to have had Marie's *Lais* in mind when he rewrites Benedeit's prologue.' K. Sarah-Jane Murray, 'Plato's *Timaeus* and the *Song of Roland*: remarks on Oxford Bodleian MS Digby 23,' *Philological Quarterly*, 83. 2 (2004), 115-26 (p.125, n.26). See also Busby, *Codex and Context* I, 465.

⁵ For a comprehensive survey of surviving Brendan material and criticism, see Glyn Burgess and Clara Strijbosch, *The Legend of St Brendan: A Critical Bibliography* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2000).

converted to Christianity in the fifth century, it is the point of origin of numerous major figures of the church, such as Columcille, Patrick, Columbanus and Brendan himself, but it is also the island of monsters, freaks and bestiality portrayed by Gerald of Wales in his *Topographia Hibernica*, consisting of observations gleaned from his travels in Ireland.⁶ In his less-than-flattering portrayal of the Irish, whom he deems to be in need of the 'civilising' influence of Anglo-Norman culture, Gerald complains that their isolation has caused them to remain in a barbarous state:

'Sed cum a conuictu mores formentur, quoniam a communi terrarium orbe in his extremitatibus, tanquam in orbe quodam altero, sunt tam remote, et a modesties et morigeratis populis tam segregati, solam nimirum barbariem in qua et nati sunt et nutriti sapiunt et assuescunt, et tanquam alteram naturam amplectuntur.' (3:93)

Since conventions are formed from living together in society, and since they are so removed in these distant parts from the ordinary world of men, as if they were in another world altogether and consequently cut off from well-behaved and law-abiding people, they know only of the barbarous habits in which they were born and brought up, and embrace them as another nature.

Despite Gerald's protestations, however, it would be inaccurate to describe twelfth-century Ireland as being out of touch with the rest of the world. It is indeed at the furthest extreme of Christendom, but, by virtue of its sea connections, Ireland is well situated to engage in the traffic of goods and ideas.⁷ The very question of the relationship between marginal – and reputedly deviant – territory like Ireland and the orthodox Roman centre of the Christian empire had been addressed six centuries earlier than Gerald in a series of letters by the Irish abbot Columbanus: 'Because of their position at the furthest point in the West from Rome, Columbanus saw recognition of Rome's primacy by the Irish as affirmation of the universal extent of the bishop of Rome's responsibility.'⁸ Responding to accusations of Pelagianism regarding the Irish church's

⁶ Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topographia Hibernie: Text of the First Recension*, ed. by John J. O'Meara, Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, 52 (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co., 1948-50), 113-78; Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, trans. John O'Meara (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982). See also Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales: A Voice of the Middle Ages* (Stroud: Tempus, 2006), pp.138-46.

⁷ See Benjamin Hudson's recent study of the history of the Irish Sea Province in the Middle Ages for a wide-ranging example of this. Hudson, *Irish Sea Studies 900-1200* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006). Literary sources such as the Icelandic *Njáls saga* also attest to the extent of Irish contact with the wider world. For an overview see Michael Richter, *Medieval Ireland: The Enduring Tradition* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

⁸ Damian Bracken, 'Juniors Teaching Elders: Columbanus, Rome, and Spiritual Authority', in *Roma Felix: Formations and Reflections of Medieval Rome*. Church, ed. by Éamonn ó Carragáin and Carol Neuman de Vegvar, Faith and Culture in the Medieval West (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 253-75 (p.254).

deviation from orthodoxy in its calculation of dates for Easter, Columbanus writes in the spirit of 'fraternal correction' both to defend his church's position and to reassure successive popes of their loyalty to Rome.⁹

Such political considerations ought to be borne in mind when considering the figure of Benedeit, who, like Gerald, was writing for the Anglo-Norman court. Benedeit's shift of emphasis from the overtly devotional to the fantastical elements of the narrative, in comparison of his poem with the more solemn *Navigatio*, may indicate a work designed to entertain its audience rather than inspire them. Nevertheless, I believe that enough of the didactic content of the story survives for us to be able to compare it with popular medieval vision literature.¹⁰ Influential texts like the early Christian *Vision of St Paul*, which depicts the apostle's vision of Hell have been claimed by critics including D. D. R. Owen and, more recently, J. S. Mackley, as direct sources for the *Voyage*, which dwells more on the torments of Hell than the *Navigatio*.¹¹ In its melding of Celtic forms and themes with Christian concerns, it also occupies a place comparable to the stories of St Patrick's Purgatory, the best known example of which is Marie de France's version, composed in the same century as Benedeit's *Voyage*.¹² The *Navigatio* tradition clearly engages with the ideas of didactic visionary literature, presenting the extreme and bizarre as lessons for the monks. Yet what the stories of Brendan really do is borrow these structures and commonplaces and turn them to the description of a 'real' journey, in the course of which Brendan gathers a chalice and paten from the jacinth pillar and stones from heaven as proof of his having been there. It is of vital importance that the monks see the wonders (of which Brendan has an arguably visionary foreknowledge) as real-world phenomena because their experiences of wonder and terror must give way to understanding that God alone has control over them. Indeed, extraordinary vision occurs in the case of the late-coming monks, whom Brendan foresees as becoming prey to

⁹ 'In compelling respect for authority [Columbanus] guarantees both the authority of the superior and the rights of the junior to speak out. He professes loyalty to Rome, the source (fons) of his faith, and therefore argues that the bishop of Rome should not take offence at what he says because, if it is truthful, Rome is the ultimate source of that truth.' (Bracken, p. 275).

¹⁰ J. S. Mackley indicates the potential interest of an in-depth comparative study of the relationship between piety, understanding and vision in the Brendan legends and narratives like the *Vision of Wetti*, the *Vision of Tungdale*, and the *Vision of Drythelm*. Mackley, *The Legend of St Brendan: A Comparative Study of the Latin and Anglo-Norman Versions*, The Northern World, 39 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), p. 242.

¹¹ Owen, *The Vision of Hell: Infernal Journeys in Medieval French Literature* (Edinburgh and London: Scottish Academic Press, 1970), p. 37, 58-66; Mackley, *The Legend of St Brendan*, pp. 199-200.

¹² Owen, *The Vision of Hell*, pp. 64-74. On the development of the doctrine of Purgatory in devotional and popular sources in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see also Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trs. by Arthur Goldhammer (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990).

demonic temptation (ll. 199-202). When Brendan and the monks return to Ireland, they are not recounting visions, but real events and places which resemble visions. Meanwhile, the geographical dimensions of this journey may in themselves have functioned as mnemonic devices for devout readers, to the point of them becoming props for visions and revelations.¹³ As they translate the narrative of Brendan's actual journey into their own spiritual progress towards salvation, an aspect emphasized in Benedeit's poem, the audiences of the Brendan stories also participate in his journey, belying claims that the devotional content of the Anglo-Norman text is subordinated to its undoubted narrative charm and excitement.

Similarly, Brendan himself is a figure open to contradictory readings; in the respect that he rejects the high social position to which he is entitled by birth (ll.27-28) he is comparable to both the martyr and ascetic saints, but he is able to move from that secular political environment to the cloister and become part of another community.¹⁴ When the motives for his journey are set out, they are expressed in the same legal-genealogical terms that may be applied to the affairs of his family (for whom he continually prays):

Deu priër prent plus suvent
 Que lui muſtrat cel paraïs
 U Adam fud primes asis,
 Icel qui est nostre herité
 Dun nus fumes deserité. (ll.48-52)

He often prayed for God to show him this paradise which was Adam's first home, the place which is our inheritance, and from which we have been excluded.

¹³ Lisa M. Bitel's study of early Christian vision culture notes that the trustworthiness of visions is largely dependent upon their occurrence in sanctified places or in special contexts, e.g. on the deathbed, with visions occurring elsewhere viewed as unreliable and tinged with sinful or pagan practices: 'The most perplexing sights for Christians took place in the wilderness of unbuilt or abandoned places where no boundaries marked sacred spaces and no manufactured landmarks helped to locate the visions of believers. [...] In general, the safest response when sighting something out of the ordinary was to run away – preferably to a church – and tell a priest.' (p.37). The *Voyage of St Brendan* manages to negotiate this difficulty by having the fantastical experiences of the monks recounted in the consecrated location of the abbey. Bitel, 'Looking Like Christians: The Material Environment of Religious Visions in Early Medieval Europe', in *Looking Beyond: Visions, Dreams, and Insights in Medieval Art and History*, ed. by Colum Hourihane. Index of Christian Art, Occasional Papers, 11 (Princeton: Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University, in association with Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 30-38.

¹⁴ All quotations are taken from Benedeit, *Le Voyage de saint Brendan*, ed. Ian Short and Brian Merrilees, Champion Classiques (Paris: Champion, 2006); all English translations are my own.

The use of 'heritét'/'deseritét' here is reminiscent of Eneas's pronouncements when the Trojans first land in Italy, a comparison which amply demonstrates the distinction between different types of afterlife.¹⁵ The way in which this is reported, however, calls to mind the community of saint, narrator and audience as, in the very location of paradise, Adam and his forementioned descendants are drawn together. It signifies exile and eventual return, and the trajectory of post-lapsarian humanity is reiterated inversely in Brendan's own journey. Adam is evoked again as the monks approach paradise, and their common descent from him is emphasized:

E par l'ot Reid del rei divin
 Or aprisment vers le calin
 Qui tut aclot le paraïs
 Dunt Adam fud poëstis.
 Nües grandes tenerge funt,
 Que li sun eir return n'i unt. (ll.1643-48)

And so by the will of divine God they now approached the fog shrouding the paradise of which Adam was master. The great shadowy clouds left Adam's heirs helpless.

While the similarities between Brendan's relationship with his monks and Jesus's relationship with his disciples is undeniable, I would argue that Adam too functions as a mirror to Brendan. The parallels between these two figures suggest an identification of Brendan with the furthest limits of human experience, but he is also a linking figure between the apparently contradictory definitions of centre and margin I have described above. In this reference to Adam, the island Brendan seeks becomes an image of limits, as it is associated with both the beginning and end of time in the Christian tradition. It has always been here, even when the heirs of Adam prior to Christ were unable to enter it, making it perhaps the perfect example of the uninhabitable island envisaged by Deleuze. The gift of eternal life, however, redefines the island, as its eschatological perfection will be achieved through its fullness with the souls of the saved. It may be an island, but it is emphatically not a desert island.

This evocation of the community of heaven by reference to the first man on earth is reinforced by the communal nature of the quest led by Brendan. While the terms describing his reasons for entering the monastery do indeed bring him close to the

¹⁵ '...ci sont nostre travail finé, / yci sera nostre herité.' (*Roman d'Eneas*, ll. 3154-55)

contemptus mundi sentiments of more conventional saints' lives, he takes the more imitable route into the cloister instead of bringing about a dramatic change in the religious culture of his background or setting.¹⁶ Rather than suffering in isolation for a lesser or greater period of time, as martyrs and ascetics do, he actively establishes communities of believers in his own lifetime, both before and after his voyage. He shares with others the witnessing of the 'merveilles' of God, but he does not himself become a conduit for miraculous works. He does not levitate, dispense miraculous cures or endure extreme physical torment without injury like Christina or Catherine, who demonstrate their submission to the will of God in acts of spectacular torture far more shocking than the trials the monks endure at sea. His desire to experience heaven while still alive sets him apart from the other saints who, in their complete surrender to the will of God, appear to be distinctly lacking in curiosity about the material world, firm in the belief that they can only reach heaven through death. In many respects, he is an appealingly ordinary saint.

Another obvious point of distinction from the saints to be met later in this study is Brendan's relationship with his fellow travellers. This is a marked contrast with the journeys of Alexis, who is indifferent to his travel companions, and Mary of Egypt, who amusedly views her fellow passengers as 'jovencels' and disregards the (supposedly) pious motivation for their journey. It is also quite distinct from the voyages of Eneas and Brutus, both of which are journeys into exile prompted by catastrophic events. Driven by his curiosity about paradise and life beyond death for both the saved and the damned, Brendan's voyage is difficult to define as either hagiography or romance of antiquity (a genre to which the *Roman de Brut* arguably belongs). While much early – and some more recent – criticism of the *Voyage de saint Brendan* tends to focus on the poem's linguistic peculiarities or its narrative elements apparently derived from Celtic and Middle Eastern traditions, more recent studies have paid greater attention to the poem's spiritual and metaphysical concerns.¹⁷ Jonathan Wooding's critical anthology of scholarship on Latin

¹⁶ Anna Maria Fagnoni traces some of the connections between patristic texts (including the lives of desert saints such as Mary of Egypt) and the *Navigatio*, underlining the case for reading Brendan's own voyage as a journey into a textually constituted imaginative desert space. Fagnoni, 'Oriental Eremitical Motifs in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*', in *The Brendan Legend: Texts and Versions*, ed. by Glyn S. Burgess and Clara Strijbosch. The Northern World, 24 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), pp.53-79. See also James E. Goehring, 'The Dark Side of Landscape: Ideology and Power in the Christian Myth of the Desert', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 33. 3 (2003), 437-51.

¹⁷ Sebastian Sobecki's study argues that the *Voyage*, as a work at a remove from the *Navigatio*, is in fact more directly influenced by the immrama, or 'rowing-about' tales. Sobecki, 'From the *désert liquide* to the

and vernacular literature in early medieval Ireland places the *Navigatio* as a crucial intertext for studies of the particularly Irish genres of *immrama* and the related *echtrae*, or adventure narratives, while Jude Mackley regards the various versions of the Brendan legend as being influenced by Biblical apocrypha and the Marvels of the East tradition.¹⁸ While it is essential to avoid treating the *Navigatio* and the *Voyage* as interchangeable, many of the observations on one also hold for the other. The article by Dorothy Ann Bray included in Wooding's volume (first published in 1995) argues for reading the 'densely allegorical puzzle' of the *Navigatio* as a hymn of praise of institutional devotion: 'The tale operates on both the level of an *immram* and that of a Christian allegory within the historical context of Irish monasticism, providing a picture of monastic life as a means of attaining the perfection of the heavenly afterlife.'¹⁹ Patricia Rumsey's comparative study of the role of liturgy in the *Navigatio* and the Rule of the Céili Dé is a particularly illuminating example of how Brendan narratives can be read as meditations upon monastic practice; her assessment of the *Navigatio* as a celebration of divine creation and communal existence is, I believe, even more true of Benedeit's poem than its Latin source.²⁰ I would argue further that the dimensions and boundaries of narrative and place are central to determining the devotional message of the poem, and that Brendan's scripted and re-narrated travels in the realm of the resolutely tangible can be read as reflections on the nature of Christian community and faith in redemption.

2. Knowledge, Prophecy and Narrative

Brendan's desire to know what happens to the virtuous and the wicked alike in the afterlife prompts his journey, but it also initiates the poem's concern with the limits of life and, analogously, the limits of narrative. The ordering of elements in the narrative is,

sea of romance: Benedeit's *Le Voyage de Saint Brendan* and the Irish *Immrama*', *Neophilologus*, 87. 2 (2003), 193-207. In a study focusing on the Middle Dutch *Brendan*, Clara Strijbosch elucidates other classical and contemporary influences on these vernacular tales, notably the bestiary tradition and Macrobius's *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*. Strijbosch, *The Seafaring Saint: Sources and Analogues of the Twelfth-century Voyage of Saint Brendan*, trans. by Thea Summerfield (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp.90-108. Endorsement of the classical concept of the Antipodes also emerges – though more problematically – in the period of the *Navigatio*'s composition through the work of Virgil of Salzburg; see John Carey, 'Ireland and the Antipodes: The Heterodoxy of Virgil of Salzburg', in Wooding (ed), pp. 133-42.

¹⁸ *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature*, ed. by Jonathan Wooding (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000); Mackley, *The Legend of St Brendan*, p. 66.

¹⁹ Dorothy Ann Bray, 'Allegory in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*', in Wooding (ed), pp. 175-86 (pp. 185-86).

²⁰ Patricia M. Rumsey, *Sacred Time in Early Christian Ireland* (London and New York: T & T Clark), 2007.

however, disturbed by the frequent incidences of foreknowledge, especially in unlikely or unexpected places. By reading Brendan's undisclosed foreknowledge and that of the people the monks meet on their voyage, it might be argued that the narrative Brendan tells and re-tells on his return to Ireland actually pre-exists the events it describes. While the question of who knows what, and when, might be unrelated to the chronology of events, it raises the issue of the role of knowledge and its transmission in defining the relationship between Brendan and his charges. It is clear throughout that Brendan's knowledge and powers of interpretation are greater than those of the monks, and in this respect the narrative may be realigned to focus on the strengthening of their faith as a result of the trials they have undergone and the wonders they have seen.²¹ Such an interpretation would cast the abbot-teacher as the generator of the narrative; like a storyteller who knows in advance what is to come, he is able to observe, direct and participate in the strengthening of faith of the monks.

There are two main respects in which Brendan should be regarded as an initiator of narrative. First, he foresees and, with the intervention of God, directs the journey of the monks, with the result that their faith is increased. He is an active participant in each monk's individual spiritual journey towards heaven. As in the first model of narration (i.e. in his directions to and encouragement of the monks), his numerous retellings of the story bring about an increase in the devotion of his audience: 'Li plusurs d'els ensaintirent / Par la vertud qu'en lui virent' (ll. 1827-28: A great number of them devoted themselves to the spiritual life because of the virtue they saw in him). We should not, however, take this as implying that following his return home Brendan becomes a mere storyteller; he participates in the multiple stories of this poem as both reader and listener.

Brendan's plans are consolidated in his preliminary journey through the forest to visit Barint, an 'ermite' (l. 75). In this early episode he seeks out information from someone whose experience of the ocean is greater than his own. Logically this is a sensible enough course of action, but the presentation of this meeting with the hermit as a journey separate from the main action adds a slightly different dimension to the portrait of Brendan; here, the saint travels alone, and he is the audience to a previously unheard

²¹ Glyn S. Burgess, 'Savoir and faire in the Anglo-Norman Voyage of St Brendan', *French Studies*, 49. 3 (1995), 257-74.

tale.²² The only other point in the narrative where Brendan is separated from the monks is on the island of paradise, where he is once again entertained by a single interlocutor who shows him as much of heaven as he is able to comprehend:

Mult bien avant l'ad cil menét,
De multes riens l'ad asenét :
Bien diviset e si li dit
De quel avrat chascuns delit. (ll. 1771-74)

[The guide] led him on further, and showed him many things: he described in detail the delights that each would enjoy.

Although the other monks are reintroduced in the subsequent lines, it seems clear that Brendan is the sole audience for this description of heaven. This passage is an obvious echo of Brendan's earlier encounter with Barint, as both involve journeys to a destination in order to gain information about a still-more-distant destination. In analysing the poem's double significance, then, we could conclude that while Brendan's journey is largely intertwined with that of his charges it can also be viewed as distinct, and that this distinction lies chiefly in the abbot's dual role as narrator and listener.

The connections between Brendan and the monks strengthen this sense of the dual-aspect voyage. Brendan is a privileged and particularly active figure in the monks' burgeoning mastery of their fears and doubts.²³ He is privy to the divine forces shaping their experiences in such dramatic episodes as their encounter with the whale, a particularly significant episode in terms of the relationship between knowledge and experience. The monks are terrified when the 'island' they have landed upon moves away from the ship, and Brendan, who had remained on the ship while they prepared a meal to celebrate Easter, comes to their rescue before explaining what has just happened. However, the messenger from the Island of Sheep, their previous harbour, had anticipated the unfolding of this encounter with the marvellous, and its aftermath:

En cel isle anuit entras
E ta feste demain i fras.

²² In a notable deviation from the *Navigatio*, it is here Brendan and not Barint who is the mobile agent in this episode: 'Cum esset in suo certamine, in loco qui dicitur saltus virtutis Brendani, contigit ut quidam partum ad eum quadem uespera uenisset, nomine Barinthus, nepos illius.' (1. 5-7: When he was fighting the good fight, in a place called Clonfert of Brendan, there arrived one evening one of the fathers whose name was Barrind, a descendant of Niall.)

²³ Burgess, '*Savoir and faire*', pp. 267-68.

Demain ainz nuit en turnerez;
 Pur quei si tost, bien le verrez!
 Puis revendrez e sanz peril,
 Bien pres siglant de cest costil.
 E puis irez en altre liu
 U jo en vois e la vus siu.
 Mult pres d'ici, la vus truverai;
 Asez cunrei vus porterai. (ll. 425-34)

You will reach this island tonight, and prepare your feast there tomorrow. Before nightfall tomorrow you will return; you will soon see why! Then you will return to safety by following this coast. And then you will go on to another place near here; I will follow you there, and will bring you provisions.

The messenger both foresees their fate and tells them how he will participate in it. In his refusal to say exactly why they will not remain for long on the other island, though, he introduces a dramatic tension by pointing forward to a future revelation, and in so doing the messenger also implicates himself as a knowledgeable subject. What is not made clear at this point is whether Brendan already knows what will happen on the island. The question of the state of Brendan's own knowledge is intimately linked with the actions of God in his favour. This connection is emphasized in their passage to this island to the next:

Vent out par Deu e tost i fud,
 Mais bien grant mer out trescurud;
 Eissi vait qui Deus meine.
 Terre prennent e sanz peine. (ll. 437-40)

God sent a wind to carry him and he soon reached it, even though it was a great expanse of sea; all those whom God assists travel in this way. They reached land without difficulty.

When they reach the island, Brendan does not disembark from the boat; there is no explanation for this, but we can surmise that he already knows, thanks to God, that he will have to rescue the monks carried away on the back of the whale. This adds an extra dramatic dimension for the reader who, like the monks, does not immediately know why the island seems to move. He views the trial they undergo as an opportunity for them to put their faith into practice, and instructs them 'Ne vus tamez, / Mais Damnedeu mult reclamez!' (ll. 457-8: 'Do not be afraid, pray to God Almighty with all your strength!'). It is only once the monks have rejoined Brendan in the boat that he explains to them what

has happened, as they watch the fire they had lit on the 'island' moving further and further away,:

'N'est pas terre, ainz est beste
 U nus feïmes nostre feste,
 Pessuns de mer sur les greinurs.
 Ne merveillés de ço, seignurs!
 Pur ço vus volt Deus ci mener
 Que il vus voleit plus asener:
 Ses merveilles cum plus verrez,
 En lui puis mult mielz crerrez.
 Primes le fist li reis divins
 Devant trestuz pessuns marins.' (ll. 469-78)

'It is not land, but a beast, upon which we celebrated; it is the greatest fish in the sea. Do you not wonder at it, my lords! God led you here to show you this, so that you may learn from it: the more of his marvels you see, the more your faith in him will be strengthened. The king of heaven made this first, before all the other fish in the sea.'

In this explanation Brendan brings to the fore the methods by which the monks' spiritual education is advanced. The prominent place of wonder on the route to enlightenment is implicitly opposed to scriptural study, but at the same time it recalls the acts of divine Creation described in Genesis. The whale's having been the first sea-dwelling life form to be created hints back to the origins of man in the Garden of Eden, and given the strategically important references to Adam I have discussed above, the whale participates in establishing a super-human, even cosmological, narrative frame for understanding the development of all mortal life from Creation to the day of Judgment. We might see an analogy here with Martin Gosman's comments on the characteristics of medieval cartography: 'Medieval *descriptiones mundi* (whether in words or in pictures) are structurally elliptic. [...] Isolated facts do not really signify; only their insertion in the macro-structure of the *descriptio* matters.'²⁴ Primacy, meanwhile, has a significance here which is quite different to the insistence of the *Eneas* poet's digression on Hector's banner being hung upon the walls of Montauban; while the first combat in the siege of Troy is invoked as a means of excluding the Trojan dishonour which precedes it (and the defeat which follows), the whale's primacy can be interpreted as a more affirmative admiration of the work of God, prior to which nothing is imaginable except God himself.

²⁴ Martin Gosman, 'Medieval "Mapping" of the World in Text and Image: Two Ways of Representing One Vision', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 25, 4 (1989), 370-80 (p.371).

The whale is a living, mobile being, but as part of the annual cycle of the monks' travels it is always in the right place at the right time, perhaps more closely analogous to a celestial body than to a member of the animal kingdom. On the next island, the Paradise of Birds, they learn how long their journey will last:

‘Or ad un an
Que avez suffert de mer l’ahan;
Arere sunt uncore sis
Ainz que vengez en paraïs.
Mult suffreiz e peines e mal
Par occean, amunt aval,
E chescun an i frez la feste
De la Pasche sur la beste.’ (ll. 545-52)

‘You have now spent a year on the turbulent sea; you have another six years to go before you reach Paradise. You will have many troubles and hardships as you are tossed up and down on the sea, and each year you will celebrate Easter on the back of the beast.’

Though initially a source of fear, the whale is to become a welcome respite for the travellers, and is one orientation point among many in their maritime circuit.²⁵ The imagery of the whale in the bestiary tradition depicts sailors landing on its back and showing sailors landing on the back of a whale and setting a pot over a fire; nevertheless, the representation of whales is complex, as they are believed to possess demonic attributes, with the story of Jonah finding himself in the belly of Hell itself: ‘Et dixit: Clamavi de tribulatione mea ad Dominum, et exaudivit me: de ventre inferi clamavi, et exaudisti vocem meam’ (Jonah 2: 3).²⁶ We can see the monks' conquering their fear of the whale as analogous to their conquering their fear of the devil. The specific detail of reaching the whale each Easter is significant as the annual celebration of resurrection, the moment at which the gates of heaven are opened, is a link forwards to their destination and back to the community they have left behind, which, we can surmise, is celebrating at

²⁵ On whales in bestiaries, see Debra Hassig, ‘Sex in the Bestiaries’, in *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life and Literature*, ed. Debra Hassig. Garland Medieval Casebooks (New York and London: Garland, 1999), pp.71-97 (p.76). See also T. H. White, *The Book of Beasts* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1984), pp. 197-99.

²⁶ See, for example, the image from Oxford, Bodley 764, reproduced in *Bestiary*, trs. and ed. by Richard Barber (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999), p. 203; grass can be seen on the exposed back of the whale, but we also see its mouth full of fish. Philippe de Thaon’s *Bestiaire* (dedicated, like the *Voyage de saint Brendan*, to Adeliza of Louvain) similarly describes the whale’s stomach as ‘so great that the people took it to be Hell’ (cited by Mackley, *The Legend of St Brendan*, p. 111).

the same time. That the whale is always where they need it to be is yet another sign of the providential favour they enjoy.

The divine influence in the region of Brendan's travels is perhaps most tangible, as I have suggested, in the uncanny knowledge displayed by the inhabitants of this zone. Wherever the monks go, and whatever their own apprehensions about the people and phenomena they encounter, the inhabitants of the various islands appear to know who they are and where they are going. This contributes to a sense of the boundedness or providential nature of the journey, but there are two significant moments when Brendan's interlocutors allude to what lies beyond his odyssey. As briefly mentioned above, the guide in paradise is one of these, but the other, whom he meets early on in the narrative, is the abbot on the Island of St Ailbe. This unnamed figure is a mirror to Brendan, performing the same function in the island community as Brendan does in his own. The two abbots are comparable as figures of authority, but the significant moment of breach between the allegorically ageless ocean and the mortality of the Irish travellers comes in the abbot of Ailbe's refusal to allow Brendan to halt his journey:

Dunc dist Brandans: 'N'est liu si chers
U mansisse si volunters.'
Respunt l'abes: 'Ço va quere
Pur quei moüs de ta terre,
Puis revendras en tun païs,
Ileoc muras u tu nasquis.
Muveras d'ici la semaine
As uitaves de Thephaine.' (ll. 771-78)

Then Brendan said 'There is no place I would rather stay than here.' The abbot replied 'You will go in search of what drew you away from your own land, then you will return to your country, and die where you were born. You will leave here in a week, on the octave of Epiphany.'

The abbot reminds Brendan of his quest, but also tells him of what will follow it. He must not be allowed to forget his two destinations. The second of these, death, is referred to by the heavenly guide later in the poem as the point at which Brendan's soul will leave his body and return to heaven. The place referred to by the abbot is doubly significant, as it marks both a return to his own point of origin, but also brings him to the point where his experience becomes the inspirational narrative to be passed on to his fellow Christians. By comparison with the ascetics Alexis and Mary of Egypt, Brendan's dual role as

adventurer and pastor implicates him in a more complex relationship with the secular sphere. The final crossing-point invoked in this extract is that of the date when Brendan and his men will leave the island of St Ailbe. Notably, this future point of departure refers to the Christian calendar, which also dictates the cyclical movements of Brendan's party around the islands.²⁷ As the talking bird (formerly an angel) on one of the previous islands had announced, they would spend six years at sea before reaching heaven, and would celebrate each Easter in that period on the back of the whale (ll. 545-52). The continuity between the fantastical world the Irish monks traverse and the one they have left behind is a crucial point in the narrative development, as both are construed as being directed by divine providence, whose mysteries are revealed to different figures at different times.

A notable example of the reverence for divine mysteries is the episode where Brendan and his men come across the canopied jewel-studded jacinth pillar. The account of this in Benedeit's poem varies substantially from that of the *Navigatio*, as the monks in the Latin text conscientiously attempt to measure the circumference of the pillar, where in the *Voyage* they simply admire it:

Cil ne crement nul peril;
Ici estunt desque al .iii. jurn;
Messés chantent tuit al lur turn.
Brandans en prent purpens en sei
Ne deit querre le Deu secrei. (ll. 1086-90)

They feared no danger; they were there for three days, each taking his part in singing mass. Brendan thought to himself that he ought not to seek to understand the secrets of God.

In contrast, the *Navigatio* has the monks at their surveying work for four days, only performing the divine office as they are preparing to leave with a chalice and paten. The objects are interpreted by this Brendan as signs of God's desire for them to be strengthened in their faith through witnessing wonders, perhaps making them analogous to the stones he is told to carry back home from heaven. Benedeit's Brendan, somewhat more prosaically, justifies seizing the objects by mentioning the liturgical purpose they

²⁷ This aspect of the movements and rituals of the monks in the *Navigatio* is treated in some depth by Rumsey, whose observations on the monks' liturgical practices as affirmation of the inherent worth of time and of the created world are also pertinent to my reading of the *Voyage* (Rumsey, pp. 167-95).

will serve (ll. 1093-96), while in the *Navigatio* they are proclaimed as wondrous proof of the greatness of God, which must be brought back 'so that the wonder be manifested to many in order that they may believe' (22. 32-34: 'Dominus noster Jhesus Christus ostendit nobis hoc miraculum, et ut ostendatur multis ad credendum mihi dedit ista [bina] munera'). In their devotional rather than empirical approach to this wonder, the monks of the *Voyage* appear to be pragmatists, leaving a greater and more deliberate space between their own minds and the mind of God, foreshadowing their being denied the full experience of paradise. The canopy surrounding the pillar which the monks pass under to reach the pillar itself, or more precisely the space between this outer layer and the object it covers, thus works metaphorically. This space stands for the epistemological gap in this version of the legend, where it is more openly acknowledged than in its antecedent. There is no such expression of the limits of comprehension in the *Navigatio*, rather, its Brendan asserts more clearly the continuity between his own small seaborne flock and his eventual audience back home. In the legend of Brendan's journey, his great achievement is his expansion of the known world to the very limits of what may be experienced by mortals, yet Benedeit's subtle marking of this edge of knowledge enhances his work's sense of marvel and adventure through creating unmappable space within the dimensions of the poetic world.

3. Marking Time at the Edge of the World

The world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world. [...] Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience.²⁸

Narrative poetry by its very nature involves sequences of events, and by extension the passage of time. It does not necessarily matter whether the order in which events are presented is the order in which they might be understood to occur, as is made clear in, for example, the use of *ordo artificialis* in the narratives of Aeneas. As Geoffrey of Vinsauf makes clear in his treatise on poetic composition, in a passage laden with the concrete imagery of travel and discovery, the 'pathway of art' need not be tied to 'nature's smooth

²⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 3.

road', if deviation from this order may result in a more satisfying whole.²⁹ What is more important is the implied understanding that events can be placed in relation to other events, whether in sequence or simultaneously, and that so doing opens out a narrative space. In this respect the semi-fantastical land-and-sea-scape of the *Voyage de saint Brendan* openly invites the construction of imaginative works.³⁰ 'Human time' and what may be called universal time are both involved in the process of narration; in this particular narrative, universal time appears to slow down as Brendan's travels bring him to the very edge of the created world and allow him to approach an understanding of what eternity means for the saved and the damned alike. This experience might be characterized in Deleuze's terms as a series of intensities conducive to the formation of narrative: 'Placed in the context of the two sides of the Deleuzian ontology – the virtual and the actual – intensities catalyse the actualisation of the virtual, generating extension, linear, successive time, extended bodies and their qualities.'³¹ The *Voyage de saint Brendan* overcomes Paul Ricoeur's 'aporia of the being and nonbeing of time' by submitting to an eschatological temporal scheme ultimately directed towards the tangible space of heaven while still appreciating the created, therefore finite, place-world.³²

The *Voyage de saint Brendan*, an influential precursor to the romance narratives which would emerge later in the twelfth century, opens out a world marked by inexplicable and marvellous phenomena, in which time seems to unfold in different ways according to different rules. This representation of the strangeness of the world of the sea also points forwards to subsequent developments in vernacular poetry. Its vivid depiction of battles involving dragons and sea monsters and spectacular examples of God's bounteous nature both mark the stages of the monks' journey and prefigure the encounters with the supernatural and the splendour of royal courts contained in romance narratives.³³ The culmination of the journey in the arrival at heaven is also comparable to the processes of the quest, which would find their apotheosis in the Grail narratives of this and subsequent centuries. Yet there is a distinct temporal divide between the life found on

²⁹ *Poetria nova*, chapter 2, ll. 87-100.

³⁰ Jill Tattersall, 'The Island and its Significance in Old French Texts of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', *French Studies*, 34. 1 (1980), 1-11 (p. 3).

³¹ Constantin V. Boundas, 'Intensity', in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. by Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 132.

³² Ricoeur, p.7. See also Casey, 'Between Geography and Philosophy: What Does It Mean to Be in the Place-World?', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 91. 4 (2001), 683-693.

³³ John D. Anderson, 'The *Navigatio Brendani*: A Medieval Bestseller', *The Classical Journal*, 83. 4 (1988), 315-22.

the ocean and the experiences of Brendan and his men. The spiritual progress of the monks is in contrast with the curious timelessness of the phenomena they encounter, and this relationship links the journey back to the themes of mortality and continuity of community pervading the text at all levels.

On the second island visited by the monks, where they meet the good guide who directs them to the whale, the first living beings they encounter are a flock of enormous sheep.³⁴ While the species is familiar to them, their size is out of proportion with anything they have previously experienced, and we may, in a Platonic light, view these sheep as something approaching ideal forms. When they ask the guide about the sheep he explains:

‘N’est merveille:
Ja ci n’ert traite öeile;
L’ivers n’en fait raëncune,
Ne d’enfertét n’i mort une.’ (ll. 419-22)

‘It is no wonder: none of these sheep is ever milked, the winter is mild, and none of them dies from illness.’

Later, on the Island of St Ailbe, the monks are told the story of how, like Brendan, the saint abandoned his family and wealth to seek peace and closeness to God. He found a boat ready and prepared for him, and it brought him to this island, where all of his needs were met by God, and where he established his own religious community. As the monks of Ailbe describe their home, it appears to be a truly miraculous site, more so than the island of sheep, whose temperate climate and easy life are, though fortuitous, still not implausible. The miraculous features of the island of St Ailbe, on the other hand, defy any explanation other than divine favour:

‘E des dous duiz que veïstes,
Dunt pur un poi ne preïstes,

³⁴ This episode is a significant indicator of the relationship between the Marvels of the East texts and the Brendan tradition. The Marvels are preserved and illustrated in three manuscripts: London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. v (Latin and Anglo-Saxon, pre-Conquest); London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A. xv (Anglo-Saxon, the *Beowulf* manuscript, eleventh century); Oxford, Bodleian Library 614 (Latin, early twelfth century), and all three refer to a land of rams as large as oxen. The images are reproduced in M R James (ed.), *Marvels of the East: A Full Reproduction of the Three Known Copies*, Roxburghe Club Publications 191 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929); see also Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995); Mackley, *The Legend of St Brendan*, pp. 109-10.

Li clers est freiz que al beivre avum,
 Li troubles calz dun nus lavum.
 E as hures que nus devum
 En noz lampes fou recevum,
 Ne pur l'arsun que cist fous fait
 Cire ne oile le plus n'en vait;
 Par lui empreint, par lui esteint,
 N'avum frere de ço se peint.' (ll. 751-60)

'You see the two streams from which you hesitated to drink; the clear one is cool water for drinking, and the cloudy one is warm for washing. And at the times when we need it, there is light in our lamps, we do not have to fill them with oil; the flame is lit by itself and it extinguishes itself, it is not tended by any of our brothers.'

This miraculous place, where everything is made fit for the monks by God, is a forerunner to heaven, but also, more obliquely, the hot and cold streams are a temperate harbinger of the two Hells of Judas. When Brendan and his monks meet Judas as they near heaven, they hear the tale of his weekly cycle of tortures in the hells of fire and ice (ll. 1353-1426). In summarizing his torment, Judas uses the exact same terms as the monks of St Ailbe: 'Tels calz, tels freiz e tel ulurs / Suffret Judas a tels dolurs.' (ll. 1425-6: 'Such heat, such cold, such stench, Judas suffers these with such sorrow.'). Glyn Burgess reads the *Voyage's* representations of positive and negative aspects of each of the four elements as providing an additional level of meaning to the allegorical journey of the text. Fire, for example, tortures Judas, and it threatens the monks in their encounters with the sea monsters, but it also cooks their Easter feast on the back of the whale and gives a perpetual light to the monks of Ailbe. Burgess suggests that this establishes a connection between the poem's religious content and its dedication to either queen of Henry I: 'La mission qu'il propose à ses mécènes en tant que reines est également celle qu'il s'était propose à lui-même en tant que poète religieux, celle de réconcilier la "lei de terre" à la "lei divine" (v.2-3), c'est-à-dire de proclamer l'interdépendance et l'indissolubilité qui existent entre les aspirations des hommes et la vie éternelle.'³⁵ In a nod back to the relative evenness of the climate on the Island of Sheep, Judas tells Brendan that the two Hells 'ne cessent estét ne iver'n' (ll. 1330: 'they do not relent in either summer or winter').

³⁵ Burgess, 'Les fonctions des quatre éléments dans le *Voyage de saint Brendan* par Benedeit', *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 38 (1995), 3-22 (pp. 21-22). See also Jean Larmat, 'L'eau dans la *Navigation de saint Brandan* de Benedeit', in *L'Eau au moyen âge*, Sénéfiance 15 (Aix-en-Provence: CUER MA, University of Provence, 1985), pp. 233-46.

Immediately after this episode, prior to the approach to heaven, the monks land on the island of Paul the Hermit. Paul knows Brendan's name 'par Deu' and 'reguard aveit angelïel / E tut le cors celestial' (ll. 1531-32: he had an angelic air and a heavenly body). He tells them that he is free from all suffering, and that he was told to come to this island by God. Like Ailbe, and with a nod to such other Celtic-inspired figures as Marie de France's Guigemar, he found a boat ready and prepared for him, and was borne to the island by God to await accession to heaven guaranteed by his faithful life of seclusion in the forest. He is 140 years old, his life of ease prolonged by the care of God. He tells the monks about his island: 'Beal tens i ad, tuz dis éstét.' (ll. 1554: 'the weather is fine, it is summer all year round'). For the first thirty years of his time on the island he was brought food by an otter, then God provided him with a fountain whose waters have sustained him for the last sixty years. The human needs experienced by the monks have ebbed away from Paul, as his 'heavenly body' is prepared for entry to paradise. It appears that the closer the monks come to their destination, the more time and its effects are slowed down, with Paul's calm assurance that he will experience unwavering comfort until he reaches heaven a final staging point in the monks' journey.

What each of these examples of timelessness, whether pleasant or horrific, demonstrates is the contrast between the lifespan of Brendan, who is sworn to the religious life but is still in contact with the world beyond the cloister, and that of these strange creatures tied to their islands. In a zone which does not appear to have any seasonal variations in conditions, the passage of time is regulated by the observance of the liturgical calendar. It determines the cyclical limits of the monks' journey, as they return to spend Easter in the same place every year, and it is the orientation grid for the other Christians they meet. It also dictates the periods of respite from torture granted to Judas, as he is temporarily spared the horrors of the hells on Sundays, on the feast days of the Virgin, Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. Though this prescribed routine is followed year after year, it is not strictly congruent with the cyclical journey of the monks, who learn to master their fears and place their trust in God by encountering the same perils again and again. Indeed, the cooking pot they left on the back of the whale the first time they landed on it is still there in the years which follow, symbolizing both the constancy of faith they aspire to and their basic physical need to eat. The *Voyage's* attention to the practical considerations of long

journeys by sea amplifies the distinction between the travelling monks and the people they meet on the way to paradise.³⁶

This series of encounters implies a journey towards convergence and non-variation, as the year-round consistency of the two hells is one of the last mirrors in this zone to the constancy of heaven. The plenitude of heaven, with its flowers perpetually in bloom and ever-ripe fruit, is the culmination of this journey, and it is this unchanging state of bliss which is too much for Brendan and his companions to comprehend. It is made clear that the all-consuming experience of heaven is the fate for Brendan's soul at the end of his life's journey, and so the true conclusion to his story is deferred while he brings back to the realm of the mortal his blessed but still incomplete knowledge of the final destinations for all mortal souls. He has drawn together beginnings and endings in setting out to discover where the good and the wicked would go after death, as well as the place where he believes he would have lived had it not been for the sin of Adam, and from which 'e sei e nus fors mist' (l. 58: [he] caused both us and him to be expelled). By travelling to the edge of the world, he has found his site of origin and eventual return. In this early reminder that Brendan, the author and the audience are bound by original sin, we are prepared for the joyous reunion of the people left behind by Brendan with him and his men, and their shared enrichment through his story.

4. Community and Return

The relationships between saints and communities is of ongoing interest in the texts studied in this thesis, but I propose that the *Voyage de saint Brendan*, with its complex place in networks of textual influence, is distinct in its presentation of the mortal life of the saint. Although there are parallels with the lives of the martyrs and ascetics, the manner in which the story of Brendan's travels is preserved and transmitted is a major factor in this distinction. Of comparable significance is the nature of the odyssey, undertaken as part of a group rather than alone; this relationship with community is also at the root of both comparisons with and distinctions from the *Roman d'Eneas'* romanced epic and the *Roman de Brut's* pseudo-history. By invoking the meta-narrative of

³⁶ Burgess, 'Savoir and faire', pp. 265-7; Sobecki, p. 202.

humanity's journey from creation to final judgement in his version of this legend, Benedeit draws our attention to the many points of convergence and distinction implicit in how the saint appears to understand his experiences. This interpretive work of storytelling, which is Brendan's final activity in his life, has consequences for the representation of the relationships between home and abroad, and between life and afterlife.

At this point, it is worth returning to the figures of Barint and Mernoc, who have such an important part in launching Brendan on his voyage. The nature of their communities implies a graduated approach of the mortal towards the celestial. We learn little about Barint's abbey, apart from its location deep in the forest, but this in itself is a significant detail. To reach the abbey Brendan travels through a landscape typically described in Old French literature as 'desert'. Its isolated location and more modest size (three hundred members, as opposed to Brendan's three thousand) further distinguishes Barint's community from that of his visitor. However, when Barint tells Brendan of his own journey to visit Mernoc, it becomes clear that the saint's voyage is to encompass a spectrum of piety, encompassing communal and solitary forms and tending towards the inaccessible (for now) but still palpable bliss of heaven.³⁷ Barint tells Brendan that Mernoc left the abbey in search of a more solitary life, and went to sea, a further act of self-segregation from society in order to be closer to God.

This differs markedly from the account of Brendan's encounter with Barint in the *Navigatio*. First, as has already been mentioned, the Barint of the Latin text comes to Brendan, while Benedeit reverses this order. The Anglo-Norman text also has Barint address Brendan alone, as opposed to the *Navigatio*, where Brendan presses their guest to tell them all about his travels. The *Navigatio* has Barint as Mernoc's father (referring to him as 'filiolus meus', or 'my little son'), a closer relationship than the one suggested by the term 'filiol', or 'godson' used in the *Voyage*. In contrast with the sequential 'thinning out' associated with distance from the inhabited world implied in Benedeit's placement of the solitary Mernoc on the island nearest to heaven, the *Navigatio* represents Mernoc as head of an abbey and Barint as a hermit. The account Barint gives of his journey to heaven with his son in the Latin version is considerably longer than that given by Benedeit,

³⁷ Rumsey, pp. 61-62; Bray, pp. 179-81.

which may partially account for the Anglo-Norman text's lack of any reference to Mernoc's way of life on his island, yet the other inversions apparent in this episode would suggest that he does indeed live alone (while the *Navigatio* also says that he 'voluit se esse solitarium' (1. 17), he later has 'pluros monachos' living with him). Benedeit's version of Barint's story preserves the essence of the journey to heaven, but does not dwell on the figure of Mernoc to the same extent:

Cil li mustrat par plusurs diz,
 Beals ensamples e bons respiz,
 Qu'il vit en mer e en terre
 Quant son filioli alat querre :
 Ço fud Mernoc qui fud frerre
 Del liu u cist abes ere,
 Mais de ço fud mult voluntif
 Que fust ailurs e plus sultif.
 Par sun abéth e sun parain
 En mer se mist e nun en vain,
 Quer puis devint en itel liu
 U nuls n'entret fors sul li piu;
 Ço fud en mer en un isle
 U mals orrez nuls ne cisle,
 U fud poüz de cel odor
 Que en paraïs gettent li flur,
 Quer cel isle tant pres en fud,
 U sainz Mernoc esteit curud:
 De paraïs out la vie
 E des angeles out l'oïde.
 E puis Barinz la le requist
 U vit iço qu'a Brandan dist. (ll. 81-102)

As he spoke at length, he showed Brendan the good examples and lessons he learned on sea and on land when he went to find his godson. His name was Mernoc, and he had been a brother in Barint's abbey, but he chose to leave it for somewhere more remote and solitary. With the consent of his abbot and godfather he set out to sea, and he was soon rewarded, as he reached a place which can only be entered by the pious. It was on an island in the ocean where storms are unknown, and he was nourished by the scent of the flowers of paradise. For this island was very close to the island where holy Mernoc had gone, and he lived as if in paradise, hearing the songs of the angels. Later, Barint went to visit him, and saw the things he told Brendan about.

In this abbreviated account, the ordering of the elements is significant; first Mernoc goes to the island alone, then later he brings Barint with him. The introductory summary, however, also alludes to the other wonders of the sea (the 'beals ensamples e bons respiz') apart from heaven itself. Barint's sea voyage in the *Navigatio* is given a specific

duration (three days), whereas in the *Voyage* it is left vague, but while the Anglo-Norman text lacks precise information on this matter it gives far more detail about paradise than the *Navigatio*. The guide in the Latin text tells him that the island has existed in the same state since the beginning of the world (l: 55-56: 'Sicut illam uides modo, ita ab inicio mundi permansit.'), while the *Voyage* presents this site as an Eden of the senses:

D'arbre n'erbe n'i ad mie
 Ki süaté ne rechrie.
 Flurs e arbres tuz dis chargent,
 Ne pur saisun unc ne targent;
 Estét süef tuz dis i est,
 Li fruiz de arbres e de flurs prest,
 Bois repleniz de veneisun,
 E tut li flum de bon peisun.
 Li flum i sunt qui current lait.
 Cele plentét par tut en vait. (ll. 1741-50)

There was no tree or herb that did not exude a sweet scent. The flowers and trees are always at their most abundant, not fading with any season. The fruit on the trees is always ripe, and the flowers always in full bloom. The woods are filled with game, and all the rivers are full of fish. The streams flow with milk, and this abundance is everywhere.

This vision of plenty introduces a reflection on the origins of man in the world which is perhaps more subtle than the commentary provided by the guide in the *Navigatio*. Recalling the episode of the jacinth pillar, the splendour of creation is to be understood on the level of wonder and sensory pleasure, rather than the more overtly intellectual approach of the *Navigatio* monks. Brendan's desire to be shown Adam's first home, expressed prior to his journey to speak to Barint is the catalyst to the journey. From this we can see how Benedeit's restructuring of the opening part of the narrative makes Brendan the ultimate storyteller/interpreter of the text while still allowing space for the instructive narratives of others. In inverting the relationship between Brendan and Barint, Benedeit emphasizes the agency of the saint and the control he exerts over his material from its beginning to its end.

As we now turn to the end of the poem, the return of Brendan and the monks to Ireland is on one level the conclusion to their journey. Their trouble-free homeward bound trip from heaven, in contrast with the outward journey, takes a mere three months, and they are joyfully received:

En treis meis sunt en Irlande
 Par la vertud de Deu grande.
 La nuvele vait par païs
 Que venuz est de paraïs.
 Ne sunt haitét sul li parent,
 Ainz sunt trestuz comunement.
 Sur tuz sunt liéed li cher frere
 De ço qu'or unt lur dulz pere. (ll. 1813-20)

In three months, by the grace of God Almighty, they were back in Ireland. The news spread throughout the country that [Brendan] had returned from paradise. It was not just the families who rejoiced; it was everyone. More delighted than anyone were the dear brothers to have their good father back.

As we trace the movements of characters in the text, it is interesting to note how the monks' coming to a halt is immediately followed by the circulation of the news of their return. In one sense, their journey has already become a portable narrative. However, the singular 'venuz est' momentarily isolates Brendan from his travel companions, and anticipates his future role as narrator of their adventure. It also returns him to his role as the spiritual father of the abbey. What is most striking in this passage, however, and is one of the points at which the *Voyage* comes closest to the romance tradition it influences, is in the spectacle of inclusiveness which attends the monks' return. In comparison with Zosimas's return to his monastery in which he tells his brother monks all about Mary of Egypt, Brendan's heterogeneous audience includes both monks and laypersons.

The reference to the families of the monks is a particularly secularizing touch. What Benedeit does with his version of the reunion scene also reinforces the link between family and community, but at the same time it traces the overlap between the monastic household and the families from which the monks have come. We are a long way here from the disapproving non-Christian families of the virgin martyrs, but we also see a distinction from Alexis and Mary, whose Christian families are ultimately excluded and condemned to oblivion by the exceptional sanctity of their offspring. The families of Brendan and the other monks may reside outwith the cloister, but the devoted religious do not appear to be as decisively divided from their relatives as we have seen in other texts. The desert of the ocean is a counterpart to this particular form of monasticism, not a mirror of it. Brendan's personal leadership of the monks on the ocean-desert extends

their community beyond the inhabited world, and provides a bridge between the monasteries he has founded and heaven, into which his inspired audience – lay and secular – will follow him.

As Benedeit makes clear, Brendan's recounting of his travels is not limited to a single occasion:

Suvent lur dist cum unt errét,
 U furent bien u enserrét ;
 E si lur dist cum prest truvat
 Quanqu'al busuign a Deu ruvat,
 L'un e l'el trestut lur dist,
 Cum il truvat ço que il quist.
 Li plusurs d'els ensaintirent
 Par la vertud qu'en lui virent. (ll. 1821-28)

He often told them about his wanderings, the good and bad aspects alike ; and he told them about how God had furnished him with everything he needed when he asked for it, and how he found what he was looking for. Many of them were strengthened in their faith by the virtue they saw in him.

The overwhelming impression created by this passage is of multiplicity – multiple acts of narration, and multiple listeners to the tale, many if not all of them hearing this same story more than once. Through repetition, the story of the voyage attains a memorial status, binding Brendan to his followers. This is similar to the way in which his interpretive and instructive guidance for his travel companions bound him to them. This sense of Brendan's participation in an oral tradition involving his own experience is another innovation by Benedeit. The corresponding passage in the *Navigatio* portrays the narrative event as a one-off:

Tunc beatus uir predictus caritati eorum congratulans narravit omnia que accidisse recordatus est in uia et quanta ei Dominus dignatus est miraculorum ostendere portenta. Postremo etiam uelocitatem obitus illius certa attertacione notauit secundum iuuenis predictum [in] terra repromissionis sanctorum. (29. 3-8)

Then the blessed man, commending them for their love, told them everything that he remembered happening on his journey and the great and marvellous wonders God deigned to show him. Finally he mentioned also the speed of his approaching death – emphasizing its certainty – according to the prophecy of the youth in the Promised Land of the Saints.

Benedeit, on the other hand, occludes the foreknowledge of Brendan's death from the telling of his story, effectively closing the voyage off as a self-contained narrative. The saint's work as storyteller is also brought back into comparison with his directorial role while on the voyage, as his message that God will provide for those who put their faith in him is the same message his companions derive from their own, first-hand experiences. Encroaching death limits the Latin Brendan's ability to continue his work of ministry after his return home, an aspect of his life emphasized in the Anglo-Norman version:

Tant cum Brandans el secle fud,
 A mulz valut par Deu vertud.
 Quant vint al tens que il finat,
 Ralat u Deus lui destinat.
 El regne Deu, u alat il,
 Par lui en vunt plusur que mil. (ll. 1829-34)

For as long as he lived Brendan, with the aid of God, was a help to many. When he reached the end of his life he returned to the place God had set aside for him. Into the kingdom of God, where he went, he led more than a thousand others.

This Brendan, though vowed to the monastic life, is also very much of the 'secle'. He seems to offer a middle path between worldliness and solitary asceticism. We might plausibly claim that his living audience is not made up solely of other monks, but includes the 'parant' who rejoice at their return. The rhyme with 'parant', 'comunement', which caused the Dido of the *Eneas* such consternation (ll. 1909-10: 'Amors n'est mie a moy egaux / quant nel sentons comunement'), here lacks the shameful double weighting Cormier identifies.³⁸ The positive sense in these lines of shared happiness is reinforced in the subsequent reference to the large number of people whose faith is strengthened by the saint and his story. We are not told exactly how long the saint does live after his return, but the implication is that however long or short his life may be, it is ultimately devoted to the support of others. Indeed, his dedication to the fates of others is clear even from before he sets out:

³⁸ Raymond Cormier identifies this line as having a double meaning, noting that it may mean Dido rues both the lack of both political solidarity between Carthage and the Trojans and the failure of her sexual relationship with Eneas. Cormier, *One Heart, One Mind: The Rebirth of Virgil's Hero in Medieval French Romance*, (Mississippi: Romance Monographs, 1973), pp. 135-36.

De Deu prïer ne fereit fin
 Pur sei e pur trestut sun lin,
 E pur les morz e pur les vifs,
 Quer as trestuz ert amis. (ll. 43-46)

He would never cease praying to God for himself and all of his family, and for the dead and living alike, for he was a friend to all.

This emphasis on communal salvation is lacking in the conclusion to the *Navigatio*, in which Brendan receives the sacraments and leaves his company to enter the kingdom of God.³⁹ With the downplaying of the element of prophecy in this episode of the *Voyage*, however, we also see a closer control on where the boundaries of narrative can be drawn. In this context, it makes sense for the heavenly guide's guarantee of salvation after a certain number of years, delivered to Brendan alone, to be obscured in this closing passage. Brendan might include it in the story he tells his audience, but Benedeit does not disclose the length of the abbot's life in his own narrative. Even beyond his own death Brendan continues to exercise his directorial powers, both through the survival of the narrative of his adventures and through the passage to heaven assured by the embrace of his message.

Conclusion

If the transmission and reception of narratives can be read as stories generating more stories, then we might also see Brendan's voyage as a journey which gives rise to further journeys, both physical and spiritual. The joyful response to the news of his safe return implies the extent of his fame and also, in crudely business-like terms, the pulling power of his brand. Even prior to his departure, we are informed of his success as a community-builder:

Par art de lui mult i vindrent
 Qui a le ordre bien se tindrent.
 Tres mil suz lui par divers leus
 Munies aveit Brandan li pius,
 De lui peranz tuz ensample

³⁹ 'Quod etiam rei probavit euentis, quia cunctis post se bene dispositis, paruo interiacente temporis interuallo, sacramentis munitis diuinis, inter manus discipulorum gloriose migravit ad Dominum, cui est honor et Gloria in secula seculorum. Amen.' (29. 8-11)

Par sa vertud que ert ample. (ll. 33-38)

Many came to join his order because of his wisdom. Brendan the pious drew three thousand men to him from many different places, and they took him as their example because of his great virtue.

On the basis of this passage, we may see Brendan as a figure who primarily initiates the journeys of others. We also see his part in the formation and establishment of a community which, as we discover at the end of the poem, is stable enough to survive the seven-year absence of its leader, a marked contrast with the illegitimate leadership of Maxence in the *Vie de sainte Catherine*, whose household is thrown into disarray in only a few days by the intervention of God through the saint. We might even speculate that the 'more than a thousand' who follow Brendan to heaven implies the continuation of the community by the rest of those left behind. This reading is justified on the grounds of the importance of the survival of the monastic community beyond the life of its founder; this is in itself a mirror to secular notions of hereditary succession and inheritance. Once again, we are brought back to the notion of paradise as the inheritance which was lost by Adam and regained by Jesus. Such a formulation is yet another example of the *Voyage's* multiple levels of meaning; inheritance structures secular life through the intergenerational transmission of titles and property, but it is also the frame by which the accession to heaven in the afterlife is understood. If the monastery they leave behind is conceived of as a worldly community of successive generations of mortals whose attention is directed towards eternity, then the monks who make the journey to the island of paradise after their deaths anticipate a form of 'coming community' while still alive.

In his comments on the form and function of halos according to Thomas Aquinas, Giorgio Agamben argues that beatitude should be understood as a form of turning outwards and resistance to classification: 'singularity here is not a final determination of being, but an unraveling or an indetermination of its limits: a paradoxical *individuation by indetermination*.'⁴⁰ In the vision of heaven promised to Brendan, where desire is impossible since nothing is lacking, we see a poetic illustration of indetermination of limits (with the exception of the limit between those who live on earth and those who endure in heaven). In this light, the usual translation of 'ensaintirent' (ll.1827) as 'they

⁴⁰ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p. 55.

became more devout' loses its sense of degree, as they are eventually welcomed into heaven in the same way as Brendan. The true acts of individuation are carried out in the secular realm – first, through the veneration of the saint, and second through the submission to monastic life which brings them closer to emulating him. To use a topographical image, I believe that Brendan should be considered a peninsular saint – one who has renounced the comforts and honours of secular society, but who nevertheless remains in contact with it. The islands of the ocean beyond his land are the space of fantasy and aspiration, 'intensities' which generate space and experience to be translated into narrative for the purposes of entertainment and instruction. Unlike Deleuze's 'île déserte', they are already populated or imbued with moral lessons, yet they teach or shelter anew each traveller who lands on them, marking the milestones of the individual's spiritual progress and participating in the subjective production of ideals. They represent future salvation, but they also require that this salvation should be the preserve of as many mortals as possible, and it is this dual aspect that characterizes the wandering saint as both narrator of wonders and inspiration towards the holy life. Brendan himself is as much hagiographer as saint, but his essential humility allows the narrative of his fantastical journey to be revealed as well as narrated to his companions.

Chapter 5

The *Vie de Saint Alexis*: shaping the saint, shaping the city

‘L’ is in fact a sign not for a book, but for a text, the oldest extant version of the French *Vie de Saint Alexis* which [the Psalter of Christina of Markyate] contains. In literary history the object is a mere repository for this text, like an obfuscatory *chasse* encasing a precious relic that has to be carefully extracted, cleansed, and retranscribed by the pseudo-scientific gaze of philological scrutiny.¹

The ultimate source of the souvenir is, in the context of European travel, the holy relic. The conversion of singular relics into reproducible commodities provided a precedent for a similar conversion of Roman art and architecture as interest in antiquities grew in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.²

It is surely no coincidence that the term Michael Camille uses to describe ‘L’, the narrative poem which is the subject of this chapter, is ‘relic’. Relic might appropriately describe any text subjected to the ‘pseudo-scientific gaze of philological scrutiny’ he criticizes, but it is particularly fitting in the context of a study of a saint’s life. Yet what may be added to his observations, which are primarily concerned with the history of print editions based on this remarkable manuscript, is the neat fit of his imagery with the content of the poem itself, the majority of whose action takes place in Rome.³ Rome, as Sarah Benson argues, is a crucial location in the history of European travel and in its associated material culture; she regards medieval artefacts like pilgrim badges and the *Mirabilia urbis Romae* as precursors to an early-modern collective cultural experience of a destination derived from mass-produced souvenir replicas of ‘the sights’. In this simultaneously fragmented and coherent perception, ‘Rome’ is as present to those who have never visited the city as to those who have seen its buildings, monuments and artworks first hand. This work of imaginative edification returns us to the imagery of the Christian saints as the building

¹ Michael Camille, ‘Philological Iconoclasm: Edition and Image in the *Vie de Saint Alexis*’, in *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, ed. by R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 371-401 (p. 372).

² Sarah Benson, ‘Reproduction, Fragmentation, and Collection: Rome and the Origin of Souvenirs’, in *Architecture and Tourism: Perception, Performance, and Place*, ed. by D. Medina Lasansky and Brian McLaren (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004), pp. 15-36 (p. 18).

³ Dombibliothek Hildesheim, MS St Godehard 1 (St Albans, Latin and Anglo-Norman, twelfth century).

blocks of the Church, casting the essential element for the consecration of altars, i.e. relics, as a figurative building material for the construction of the transitional city of God.⁴

Of course the significance of Rome to the history of relic culture predates the composition of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, but I would argue that this poem's concern with place troubles the very notion of the sanctity of this city. Far from representing Rome as a site of long-established processions and rites, where the monuments to Christianity sit placidly alongside (or on top of) the remains of antiquity, the *Vie de saint Alexis* depicts a city on the brink of chaos. It might even be argued that Rome is a more significant presence in the poem than the saint, functioning both as a real place and as an imaginative repository for ideas about empire, history, and the universality of the church. While this point about the city as a living presence in the text has already been made by others, I intend to focus critically on the extent to which the city represented as undergoing 'transformation' thanks to the saint is actually changed.⁵ More than a figure representing a point of contact between the mortal and divine, Alexis becomes a politicized agent for potential revolution; the poet's treatment of the saint in this Life is, I would argue, an example of careful management of tensions between social groups who have varying means but shared desires. My treatment of this Life which is not strictly speaking about a saint makes similar use of the textual culture around sanctity to Robert Bartlett's study of documents relating to the canonization of the English saint Thomas de Cantilupe. Bartlett's use of the witness testimonies to the candidate's miracles exemplifies the way that documents on canonization procedure can also serve as sources for social history, and demonstrates how such records can reveal details about the lives of participants in such proceedings for whom little, if any, other evidence survives: '[the inquiry] was an incident like all historical moments: unique, and also an intersection of many paths. Looked at one way, it concerns the colonial subjection of the Welsh to the English; from another, the relationships within an irritable aristocratic family; and from yet another, the

⁴ Cynthia Hahn draws attention to this potent metaphor as exploited in the writings of Gregory the Great in *Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Century* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 34-35.

⁵ D. Karl Uitti, *Story, Myth and Celebration in Old French Narrative Poetry 1050-1200* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 32-42; Nancy Vine Durling, 'Hagiography and Lineage: The Old French *Vie de saint Alexis*,' *Romance Philology* 40, 4 (1987), 451-69; Molly Robinson Kelly, *The Hero's Place: Medieval Literary Traditions of Space and Belonging* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

growth of a new saintly cult.’⁶ The place of the saint, both spatially and genealogically, is finally determined by this relationship.

In this telling of the legend, Alexis is the only son of Eufemien, a high-ranking Roman official who prays fervently for an heir. The longed-for son is brought up with a view to his emulating his father as servant to the emperor, but Alexis seeks to lead a more spiritually rigorous life, and he runs away from home on his wedding night, sailing off to Alsis (Edessa), where he remains for seventeen years. He desires anonymity, so when he is called upon as ‘man of God’ by an icon of the Virgin he gets on a boat, but God’s will is that he should return to Rome. Emaciated by years of living in poverty, he is not recognized by his family, in whose home he seeks shelter. He lives under a staircase in their house for the last seventeen years of his life, mocked by all. Just before his death, he calls for materials to write his testament. It is this document, taken from his lifeless hands by the pope, which confirms his status as the ‘man of God’ who will save the city from destruction. Eufemien and his family lament Alexis, but join with the rest of the city in honouring him and praising the miracles worked through him as he is laid to rest in a splendid tomb.’

As Camille’s comments on the range of possible interpretations of the *Vie de saint Alexis* suggest, the particular circumstances of this textual event demand close attention. This – the oldest surviving French version of the poem – is incorporated into the lavish St Albans Psalter (also referred to as the Psalter of Christina of Markyate, its probable original owner), a twelfth-century manuscript which has received much critical attention from art historians.⁷ The ‘Alexis quire’ also contains an extract from Gregory the Great’s letter to Serenus regarding the use of images in Christian worship (in Latin and French), a sequence of miniatures depicting the narrative of Christ on the road to Emmaus, and a psychomachia in Latin accompanied by a drawing of two battling knights on the same page as a decorated *Beatus vir* initial containing a large image of King David. The quire is bound between a cycle of full-page biblical miniatures and the Psalms, and though it shows signs of having been used independently of the rest of the existing manuscript, the

⁶ Bartlett, *The Hanged Man: A Story of Miracle, Memory, and Colonialism in the Middle Ages* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 141.

⁷ Otto Pächt, *The Rise of Pictorial Narrative in Twelfth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962); Otto Pächt, C R Dodwell and Francis Wormald, *The St Albans Psalter (Albani Psalter)*, Studies of the Warburg Institute, 25 (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1960); Jane Geddes, *The St Albans Psalter: A Book for Christina of Markyate* (London: British Library Press, 2005).

question of its relationship to the rest of the book remains uncertain.⁸ Camille argues that the importance of spectacle and visual impression in this version of the Life, which is enhanced by consideration of the other materials in the manuscript, has been disregarded by studies which have approached the work as above all an example of early literary French.⁹ I would agree with this, but believe that the 'obfuscatory chasse' also modifies our understanding of this poem in a somewhat different direction to that proposed by Otto Pächt and, more recently, Jane Geddes, who see the half-page Alexis miniature, which opens the quire, as indicating the praise of chastity.¹⁰ The miniature depicts Alexis taking leave of his wife and setting out on his travels, and presents the three distinct moments of him handing over his ring and sword-belt, leaving her behind as through the door and boarding the ship.¹¹ The argument for the choice of episode for illustration as evidence for the foregrounding of the chaste marriage as the crucial element of the story is convincing, yet the placement of this text at the heart of a codex which so clearly celebrates the uses of visual art, song, and performance in Christian worship also draws our attention to diverse forms of devotion and instruction.¹² Indeed, the psalter manuscript as a whole is comparable to the richly decorated tomb and church in which Alexis is interred, in the respect that its aesthetic appeal is both a support to the veneration of its contents and evidence of the majesty of the saint whose life is incorporated in it.¹³ The inclusion of Pope Gregory's widely known letter on the use of images underscores this, and this excerpt can be plausibly linked with the *Alexis* poem's concerns with display and performance as well as with the actual material of the saint's

⁸ Bepler, Kidd and Geddes, *The St Albans Psalter (Albani Psalter)* (Simbach am Inn: Verlag Müller & Schindler, 2008), p.142; Pächt, (in Pächt, Dodwell and Wormald eds.) pp. 137-42.

⁹ Camille, pp. 386-90.

¹⁰ The motif of chaste marriage is also seen as evidence for the connection between Christina of Markyate and this book, though Jane Geddes and Peter Kidd also see it as relevant to the life of Geoffrey of Gorham, abbot of St Albans and Christina's protector and adviser. Pächt (in Pächt, Dodwell and Wormald eds.), pp. 139-40; Geddes, *The St Albans Psalter*, pp. 115-16; Kidd (in Bepler, Kidd and Geddes), pp.79-80. See also Joanna Royle, 'Transitional Holiness in the Twelfth Century: The Social and Spiritual Identity of *Domina* Christina of Markyate' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2008), pp. 222-26.

¹¹ The image is reproduced in Geddes, *The St. Albans Psalter*, p. 67.

¹² The St. Albans manuscript contains a unique prose introduction to the *Alexis*, which appears below the miniature on the first page of the quire. Its references to previous performance of this narrative emphasise the saint as an object of common knowledge and underlines the connection between the visual and the written: 'Ici cumencet amiable cancon espiritel raisun di cest noble barun eufemien par num, e de la vie de sum filz boneuret del quel nus avum oit lire e canter' (Here begins the lovely holy song of this noble lord named Eufemien, and of his blessed son, about whom we have heard readings and song).

¹³ On medieval justification of the use of dazzling artistry in the service of Christian worship and teaching, see the articles by Martina Bagnoli and Cynthia Hahn in Martina Bagnoli, Holger A. Klein, C. Griffith Mann, and James Robertson (eds.), *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe* (London: The British Museum Press, 2011). Bagnoli, 'The Stuff of Heaven: Materials and Craftsmanship in Medieval Reliquaries', pp. 136-47; Hahn, 'The Spectacle of the Charismatic Body: Patrons, Artists, and Body-Part Reliquaries', pp. 162-72.

cult. Meanwhile, individual elements of the Alexis miniature bring to the forefront a theme as much as they do a particular episode; the emphasis on ritual objects (the wedding ring), the movement across thresholds (Alexis at the doorway), and the contrast between stasis and mobility (the wife standing still in a pose of lament as Alexis boards the vessel) are picked up in the later parts of the poem, especially in the procession. This aid to private devotion must also, I believe, be seen as an example of the relationship between material culture and the very idea of sainthood in its civic context. To this end, this chapter will examine closely the procession of Alexis's body through the streets of the city and its being laid to rest in full Roman pomp.

This chapter, which focuses primarily on *Alexis* L, examines three inter-related aspects of the poem: mobility (especially but not exclusively that of the saint), textual transmission and the experience of limits. These elements work together in the poem to produce a complicated picture of relationships between different social groups and different types of space, undercutting the poet's admiration for the 'tens ancienur' (days of old) expressed in the opening lines. I believe that such a reading of the text sheds new light on its didactic dimension, wherein the maintenance of social order underpins the carefully choreographed movement of Alexis and the other Christians from one place to another. The role of the 'boen clerc e savie' (l. 375) – here, the clerk who reads out the saint's letter, but by extension also the poet – is pivotal to the establishment of written text as a privileged means of communication, which acts as a prelude to and record of the spectacular miracles performed around Alexis's corpse. Finally, the experience and transcendence of limits demarcating one place from another is, I would argue, the crucial matrix in the poem. I examine how the event of the procession and burial affords the city an opportunity to reaffirm its adherence to Christian orthodoxy at the same time as granting a special position to the saint's family and, by extension, the social elite to which they belong. The poem's proclaimed message of the universality of salvation is not entirely borne out in its representation of this early phase in the development of the cult of Alexis.

1. The trajectory of the saint

As an ascetic who flees his family and social responsibilities, and shows little but contempt for his own physical survival, Alexis might be conceived of as a figure who insistently denies his relationship to place, both genealogical and geographical. However, the poem's representation of the journeys made by the saint complicates this picture of material denial. The various ways in which he is received in life and death, meanwhile, suggest that the poem's professed concerns with correcting the 'here and now' do not simply bear a nostalgic relation to the events and figures it describes. In common with other saints, Alexis' renunciation of reproductive activity represents the genealogical failure of his family, but this is more problematic here than in the other texts, where the family is either non-Christian, and thus compelled to either convert or accept their necessary obsolescence (as in the cases of Christina and Catherine), or is forgotten (Mary of Egypt's Christian parents who plead with her to agree to marry are not mentioned again directly after the first hundred and fifty lines). Here, the return to the family home shifts the nexus for intergenerational continuity away from strictly biological reproduction to the perpetuation of an appropriately devoted community of faith.

As previous critics of the text have pointed out, it is possible to view Alexis's journey from Rome to Edessa and back again as circular, as the legend's bringing the reluctant saint back to his point of origin forces him to reconsider his relationship to it.¹⁴ However, we ought to add to the notion of circularity a consideration of the living saint's relationship to heaven, the site he considers to be his ultimate destination and true home. Alexis's favour with God is clear from the very manner of his birth, as he is proclaimed by the narrator to be a gift from God (l. 28: 'Un filz lur dunet, si l'en sourent bon gret'), so his proximity to heaven is assured even before he becomes aware of it himself. In Edessa, we learn from an exchange between the 'imagina' dedicated to the Virgin and the sacristan who tends the altar in the church where it is located that Alexis's salvation is assured:

¹⁴ Joseph P. Williman, 'Trauma and Healing in the *Vie de saint Alexis*', *Diakonia: Studies in Honor of Robert T. Meyer*, ed. by Thomas Halton and Joseph P. Williman (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), pp. 333-42; Margaret Burrell, '(Dis)closure in *La Vie de Saint Alexis* and the Vocabulary of Desire', *AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Modern Languages Association*, 95. 1 (2001), 1-12. See also Kelly, pp. 92-98.

Ço dist l'imagena: 'Fai l'ume Deu venir,
 Quar il l'a des- bien ed a gret –servit,
 Ed il est dignes d'entrer en paradis.'
 Cil vait, sil quert, mais il nel set coisir,
 Icel saint home de cui l'imagene dist.

Revint li costre a l'imagene el muster:
 'Certes, dist il, ne sai cui antercier.'
 Respont l'imagene: 'Ço est cil qui tres l'us set:
 Pres est de Deu e des regnes del ciel,
 Par nule guise ne s'en volt esluiner.' (ll. 171-80)¹⁵

The image said 'Bring the man of God here, for he has long served him well and willingly, and is worthy of entering paradise.' [The sacristan] goes, and looks, but he cannot find the holy man of whom the image speaks. The sacristan returns to the image in the church and says 'To be sure, I don't know who to ask.' The image replies 'He is the one who sits near the door: he is close to God and the kingdom of heaven, in no way does he want to be kept away from it.'

The miraculous image's location within the church underlines the sanctity of the place, and reinforces the view of officially consecrated space as the privileged locus for contact between the mortal and the divine, that is, the point at which space and place come together. Alexis is already described as being close to heaven, implying transcendence of his physical being and surroundings, but he is also close to the entrance of the church, a parallel which subtly reiterates the special status of consecrated space. Given that the church porch was typically the location for marriage ceremonies in this period, we are reminded of the public married life Alexis has renounced. We might also read his location by the church door as an allusion to his eventual sanctification, given the prestige of burial near the doors of a church throughout the medieval period.¹⁶ The sacristan's two journeys illustrate the importance of recognition to the narrative as a whole, and they may be interpreted as a parallel of Alexis's own journeys, with his misgivings about returning to Rome a parallel to this moment of misunderstanding or misrecognition. The sacristan's quest to find Alexis can even be seen as the pivotal point in which his journey is transformed, and it functions as a mirror to the search parties sent out by Eufemien;

¹⁵ All citations in French are from *La Vie de saint Alexis*, ed. Maurizio Perugi, Textes littéraires français (Geneva: Droz, 2000); translations into English are my own.

¹⁶ 'Burial *ante limina ecclesiae* articulated in physical form the metaphor of the soul awaiting judgement before entrance into paradise; it was thus a form of *humiliatio-exaltio* for great men.' Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer, 'Defining the Holy: The Delineation of Sacred Space', in Hamilton and Spicer (eds.) *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 1-23 (p. 11).

the sacristan can only find Alexis because he knows what he is, rather than his name or where he comes from. Alexis, meanwhile, may have set out from Rome with the intention of serving God as humbly and anonymously as he possibly can, but has not yet learned to submit to the will of God:

Cil vait, sil quert, fait l'el muster venir:
Est vus l'esample par trestut le païs
Que cele imagine parlat pur Alexis;
Trestuit l'onurent, li grant e li petit,
E tuit le prient que d'els aiet mercit.

Quant il ço veit quil volent onurer,
'Certes, dist il, n'i ai mais ad ester,
D'icest honur nem revoil ancumbrier.'
Ensure nuit s'en fuit de la ciptét,
Dreit a Lalice revint li sons edrers. (ll. 181-90)

He went and sought him, and brought [Alexis] to the church: the example of Alexis spoken by the image is heard throughout the country; all honoured him, great and humble alike, and all begged for his mercy. When he saw that they wanted to honour him, he said 'I do not wish to be here any longer at all, I do not want to be burdened with this recognition.' In the middle of the night he fled the city, going straight to the port to resume his journey.

In his initial leave-taking of his wife, he makes no reference to the will of God, and it does not appear that he has received any clear message or indication of his will from God, at least not prior to the utterances of the image. The absence of communication with God raises the fearful spectre – for the reader, at least – of there being no life beyond death. A fear frequently transmuted into proof of the illogicality of Christianity in lives of martyrs, this 'parabolic' divine silence introduces an existential gap in which there is nothing but the saint's faith to sustain him.¹⁷ This is the first recognition of him since he left Rome, and it comes from a divine rather than a mortal source. He desires to move on to another place where he can once again be anonymous but is thwarted by God directing his boat

¹⁷ John Dominic Crossan interprets parables as 'story events' which 'create room for God' by subverting mythic continuities and introducing existential uncertainties. Crossan's comment that 'it takes two to parable' underlines the relocation of anxiety from the saint to the reader in cases like the *Vie de saint Alexis*. This is echoed in Alexandre Leupin's characterization of Alexis's duty: 'in the least improper way possible, he must say God, and he must do so in the time of a human worldliness that remains deaf to this word and blind to its effects. [...] The saint must make of himself a lexis of the Divine.' In the end, though, Alexis does not 'name God', nor does God name him in any terms other than 'the man of God'; it is left to the 'boen clerc e savie' to publish his testimony and confirm his body as a conduit for divine power. Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Niles, IL: Argus, 1975), p. 87; Leupin, *Barbarolexis: Medieval Writing and Sexuality*, trans. by Kate M. Cooper (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 48.

back to Rome. Alexis's reluctance to return to the place of his birth signifies an untenable desire to prolong this liminal state (which will later be mirrored in the people's anguish at the forcible removal of his body to its tomb), while his enforced journey closes off the possibility of perpetual deferral of identification.

Alexis's longing to go to Tarsus in the next phase of his journey is in marked contrast with the earlier non-specific desire simply to flee Rome. It is this act of will which brings him to the brink of conflict with God, but the brief account of the journey as well as the destination itself also merits attention:

Danz Alexis entrat en une nef,
Ourent *lur* vent, *laisent* curre par mer,
Andreit Tarson espeiret ariver
Mais ne puet estra, ailurs l'estot aler:
Andreit a Rome *les* portet li orez. (ll. 191-95, emphasis mine)

Noble Alexis boarded a boat, and with the wind at *their* back Alexis hoped to arrive at Tarsus before long, but this was not to be, he had to go elsewhere: the winds carried *them* straight to Rome.

This remarkably succinct account of what must have been a lengthy voyage raises some important comparisons with other texts in this study, most of which involve sea journeys of some description, but none of the other protagonists have companions so vaguely sketched. Alexis's companions are only referred to very obliquely, yet it is significant that he is not at sea on his own. Are we to infer that it is God's will that he and his company alike should go to Rome? Is Alexis's second flight from the world reconfigured as a medieval pilgrimage? It is potentially a tendentious point, and I am reluctant to describe the entire journey away from and back to Rome as a pilgrimage as it has no clear object or time limit. Nevertheless, this cautious suggestion foreshadows the attention to lay religious practice in the funeral procession section of the poem. This grudging return journey could, I believe, be interpreted as a domestication of the ascetic flights of the desert fathers; Alexis may wish to be apart from the things that remind him of the honours of this world, but the return to a familiar site redefines his journey in terms not dissimilar to medieval practices of pilgrimage.

The saint's implied desire to reach Tarsus does not explicitly entail him having set out to go to this pilgrimage site. The destination is not mentioned until the voyage is underway,

so we might infer that 'noble Alexis' who is still in a sense 'ancumbrez' by secular recognition, though only on the part of the poet, has jumped on the first ship leaving the port. Regardless of whether or not he actually intended to go to Tarsus, though, it is worth bearing in mind the significance of the city's most famous son for this particular poem and its representation of institutional religion. Paul's status as proselytizer and prodigious writer of letters brings to the fore the notion of the 'world church', whose far-flung members are in correspondence with those at its centre. Again, this anticipates the role Rome plays in the medieval church, a point underscored in another of the Alexis manuscripts, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, nouv. acq. fr. 4503, in which *Alexis* (in the version hereafter referred to as A) is followed by a papal bull from Alexander III, translated into French.¹⁸ It also foreshadows the singular letter written by Alexis on his death-bed. The connection with Rome as the centre of a larger institutional network is also pertinent, for while Paul was able to declare 'civis Romanus sum', naming himself a citizen of the empire and subject to the protection of its laws, Alexis's journey home takes him back to the seat of the church Paul helped to found. Yet the critical distinction (for this poet) arguably still remains; while Paul is engaged in establishing the first Christian communities, Alexis comes from and is returned to a community which has become complacent. In this way, the poet echoes his opening comments on the perceived degeneracy of his own period in comparison with a previous, more virtuous, one in alluding to a similar distinction between the period of St Paul and the vaguely defined age in which Alexis is supposed to have lived.¹⁹ Recent work on Paul has regarded the personal theology and world-view subtending his letters as a form of narrative, and sees the substructure and its articulations as mutually reinforcing: 'narrative contours in the Pauline cognitive landscape are not simply the product of deeper theological processes

¹⁸ This version has been edited by T. D. Hemming; *La Vie de saint Alexis: texte du manuscrit A*, Textes littéraires, 90 (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994). This manuscript also contains an extract from the *Bible moralisé* of Herman de Valenciennes on the Assumption of the Virgin, the *Vie de sainte Catherine*, Benedeit's *Voyage de saint Brendan* (which precedes *Alexis*), and ends with the papal bull by Alexander III concerning the Knights Templar. I am grateful to Jim Simpson for advice on this manuscript. On the more pious intent of A in comparison with L, see Donald L. Maddox, 'Pilgrimage Narrative and Meaning in Manuscripts L and A of the *Vie de saint Alexis*', *Romance Philology*, 27. 2 (1973), 143-157.

¹⁹ The legend of Alexis is complicated by differences and contradictions between the numerous *vitae* in Latin, Greek and Syriac; it incorporates details from the lives of John Calybite and Mar Riscia, a holy man of Edessa. On the development of Alexis legend see also Uitti, *Story, Myth and Celebration*, pp. 8-12. See also Maurizio Perugi's notes to his edition of the poem, pp. 13-15.

but are themselves generative of theological articulations.’²⁰ While Paul sends letters, Alexis effectively *becomes* a letter, a means for communication between the mortal and the eternal.

The nature of Alexis’s journey belatedly comes into question by those who receive him in Rome. It is notable that his family do not enquire about the identity of the strange beggar who turns up at their house looking for shelter, once it has been established why he has come to them:

‘Eufemien, bel sire, riches hom,
 Quar me herberges pur Deu an tue maison,
 Suz tun degrét me fai un grabatum
 Empur tun filz dunt tu as tel dolur:
 Tut soi amferm, sim pais pur sue amor.’ (ll. 216-20)

‘Eufemien, good lord, rich man, shelter me in your house, for God’s sake.
 Make me a humble bed under your stair for the sake of your son for whom
 you have such sorrow: I am very ill, so feed me for love of him.’

Alexis’s appeal to Eufemien for the sake of his absent son sets up a relationship between the stranger and the family based upon reference to an absent, unknowable object.²¹ It also accords with Augustine’s definition of a people in *De civitate Dei*, through which he seeks to establish a mode of community transcending the boundaries of city or empire:

Velut si dicatur: “Populus est coetus multitudinis rationalis rerum quas diligit
 concordi communione sociatus”, profecto, ut uideatur quails quisque populus
 sit, illa sunt intuenda, quae diligit. (19: 24)²²

Let us say that a people is an assembled multitude of rational creatures bound together by a common agreement as to the objects of their love. In this case, if we are to discover the character of any people, we have only to examine what it loves.

²⁰ Bruce W. Longenecker, ‘Narrative Interest in the Study of Paul: Retrospective and Prospective’, in *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Bruce W. Longenecker (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), pp. 3-16 (p. 9).

²¹ On the difficulty of determining the Subject (in narratological terms) of the *Vie de saint Alexis*, see Evelyn Birge Vitz, *Medieval Narrative and Modern Narratology: Subjects and Objects of Desire*, New York University Studies in French Culture and Civilization (New York and London: New York University Press, 1989), pp. 133-46.

²² Saint Augustine, *De civitate Dei*. Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, vol. 40 (Vienna, 1900); *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. and ed. by R. W. Dyson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

This gesture identifies the late antique Roman aristocrats with the emerging medieval practice of looking after beggars, seen as a means for the wealthy to doing one's duty to God. The ascetic, who claims no kinship with Eufemien or attachment to Rome, places himself alongside the family in grieving for the lost son whose absence has arrested the continuation of their genealogical line. We might see the missing family member as an unchartable space around which they can circulate but can never fully comprehend, in a similar manner to the incomprehensible jacinth pillar in the *Voyage de saint Brendan*. Indeed, the very location of his bed under the stairs implies a tension between stasis and motion, as the staircase represents a threshold between one place and another, comparable in its liminality to the door of the church in Edessa. However, we can also see this space as capable of being transformed into the other incomprehensible region of Benedeit's poem: heaven itself. The vacant space will eventually be filled, as through his testimony Alexis repositions himself as the son of Eufemien and, more generally, as a son of Rome.²³ In this text, the origins of the cult of Alexis begin to be formed the moment he flees the city; his family's devotion to him in his capacity as heir and husband represents a kind of pre-emptive, even semi-heretical, veneration, with their grief at discovering that he had lain in their midst expressed in terms of their failure to be regenerated on earth through him. This reading may be strengthened by reference to Alexis's status as longed-for gift from God to a couple who feared dying without an heir. The cult may already exist, but it lacks a true understanding of its object, and this is the lesson Eufemien and his wife are to have learned by the end of the poem; in his death Alexis offers them a version of eternity located beyond the material world of tombs and titles.

Through the closing-in of lay and official groups on Eufemien's house, the body of the saint, previously mocked and despised, becomes a destination, a contact point with heaven. When Eufemien refers to the as-yet-unidentified body as 'uns morz pelerins' (l. 354), he unwittingly confirms the continuous journey of the saint, whose concurrent physical degradation and spiritual improvement has culminated in his ascent to paradise:

²³ In Žižek's reading of Lacan's 'Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"', Alexis arguably occupies the position of the letter which – eventually – reaches its destination: 'Within [the] dimension of the outstanding debt, the role of the letter is assumed by an object that circulates among the subjects and, by its very circulation, makes out of them a closed intersubjective community. Such is the function of the Hitchcockian object: not the decried MacGuffin but the tiny 'piece of the real' which keeps the story in motion by finding itself 'out of place'.' Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, 2nd edn (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), p. 21.

Li apostolie e li empereür
 Sedent es bans e pensif e plurus,
 Iloc esguardent tuit cil altre seinors,
 Deprient Deu que conseil lur an duinst
 D'icel saint hume par qui il guarirunt.

An tant dementres cum il iloc unt sis,
 Deseivret l'aneme del cors sainz Alexis,
 Angeles l'enportent en ciel en paradis
 A sun seinor que il ot tant servit:
 E! reis celeste, tu nus i fai venir! (ll. 326-35)

The pope and the emperor sat in their thrones, thoughtful and tearful, looking out at their other lords. They pray to God to give them counsel about this holy man through whom they would be saved. While they were seated there, Saint Alexis's soul separated from his body. Angels carried it upwards to heaven, to his lord whom he had served so well: ah, king of heaven, may you bring us there too!

Alexis's journey toward heaven has been completed, and for this reason (though he does not yet realize it) Eufemien's naming him a pilgrim both sanctifies his death and implies the onward transit of his body through the city. His declaration that the body is that of a traveller is simultaneous to the supernatural voice's naming the location of the holy man who will save the city and thus directing the people of Rome to this same spot. The charity shown by Eufemien to the anonymous saint is now to be transferred to the city as a whole, whose people demand that he gives them salvation.²⁴ It is also notable that the rare narratorial intervention in l. 335 draws together the devotees of his poem, himself, and the audience. The moment of the saint's death is counterposed with the desperation of the leaders of the city, statically located in the symbols of their own power as they attempt to solicit help in saving the city from destruction. This contrast of the abject with the mighty underlines the superiority of Alexis's death to his life, since in death he furnishes Rome with a physical conduit to the divine. Again, as in his physical journey from Edessa to Rome, he is accompanied by others, only this time his companions are not

²⁴ Eufemien's charitable obligation is a dimension to his identity as a Christian. As he hands over the body of his long-lost son, the wealthy man who had previously demonstrated his benevolence through the treatment of a lone stranger becomes the ultimate urban almsgiver, at last fulfilling his part in the network of divine gift-giving. The means by which this duty of the wealthy is enforced in the Middle Ages is noted by Miri Rubin: 'The onus of distribution was on the one who had been provided with goods, and when this duty was not carried out it warranted a certain degree of social pressure – according to some writers, actual violence – in the enforcement of the obligation.' Rubin, *Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 74.

pilgrim-type figures but those whose origins are in heaven itself. What all these references to the people surrounding Alexis point towards is the emerging view of the saint as property of a reinvigorated Christian community, whose unity is about to be tested by an encounter with the divine which transcends any experience of scripture.

2. Text and transmission

Alexis's letter aside, the representation of writing and reading practices in this poem may be insignificant – particularly when compared with a text like the *Vie de sainte Catherine* whose protagonist and (proxies of the) antagonist are emphatically well-read – but this singular instance is nonetheless vital to the overall meaning of the text. Alexis's wish to be beyond all forms of connection with other people makes his decision to write the letter bearing his testimony all the more important, and is a major part in his moving beyond renunciation of the world to agent for the salvation of that same world. It is the only gesture he makes to indicate the place he left vacant in the family with whom he has resided for seventeen years, so it becomes the point of intersection between the history of the family and the history of the city. Even prior to his writing it, though, the role of text has already been privileged in Alexis's particular form of religious observance on his return to Rome:

En sainte eglise converset volenters,
 Cascune feste se fait acomunier,
 Sainte esriture ço ert ses conseillers :
 Del Deu servise le rove esforcer,
 Par nule guise ne s'en volt esluiner. (ll. 256-60)

He happily stayed for long periods of time in holy church, taking communion on every feast day, and holy scripture was his guide: he prayed for God's work to be done, and did not want to be distant from him in any way.

In this emphasis on proximity, we might see a parallel with Paul the Hermit in the *Voyage de saint Brendan*, a figure whom Alexis appears to resemble more closely than the saintly abbot himself. Paul replicates physically what Alexis experiences spiritually; he is literally nourished by a miraculous stream provided by God, while Alexis is spiritually nourished by 'sainte esriture'. However, in the reference to 'sainte esriture' we can perhaps see a

harbinger of the official literate culture of Christianity into which the saint will be incorporated. In this respect, it is interesting to note that this stanza (as well as the previous one describing the saint's redistribution of the food he receives to those even poorer than himself) is omitted from version A. This version, which also omits the last fifteen stanzas of L, is regarded by Donald Maddox as offering a didactic message distinct from that of L, as A's exclusion of the miracles, the lavish funeral ceremony and the final return to Alexis's family shifts the emphasis to Alexis's personal journey towards salvation and away from his role as intercessor.²⁵ I would add to this case for L's presentation of the saint primarily as an intercessor that its inclusion of the image of Alexis worshipping in church underlines the saint's relationship with the wider Christian congregation, anticipating the thaumaturgical powers of his corpse. By retaining this example of one of the more imitable aspects of Alexis's piety the L version makes him an example of the ambiguous, liminal nature of sainthood, i.e. the state of subjects who are both human and non-human. Written language does not just serve to identify the saint: it is an intrinsic element of his faith, anchoring him in a community he can no longer reject.²⁶

The relationship of text to place is, in this context, paradoxical, as the vernacular poem refers to the transcendental reach of the language of the liturgy. Rome is undoubtedly the most significant geographical location of the text, but the Latin scriptures to which Alexis adheres suggest the universality of his religious practices, comparable in form (if not in degree) with those of his family, the inhabitants of Rome, and the poem's audience alike.²⁷ In this respect, we can see the moment of the letter's public reading as a point of intersection in three ways: between the individual and the crowd, the mortal and the

²⁵ 'The concluding fifteen stanzas of L have been criticized for detracting from the lesson of asceticism imparted by Alexis' repeated flights from worldly pomp. Such criticism is justified only if the moral lesson of A is applied to L, but [...] the miracles of healing, the conversion of the Emperors, and the salvation of the family all contribute to the idea of an intercessory saint, who contrasts radically with the idea of Alexis as 'pilgrim worthy of imitation' set forth in A.' Maddox, p. 155.

²⁶ 'The saint's association with the written word becomes essential to the understanding of the text, and helps us as readers to achieve a symbiosis with the Roman audience hearing the saint's *charte* read for the first time. The juxtaposition of the two texts (i.e., the saintly and the clerkly) creates a framework of spiritual filiation through which the audience achieves access to the saint and the possibility of redemption.' Durling, p. 468.

²⁷ Systematic valorization of orthodoxy was witnessed earlier in the medieval period with Charlemagne's promotion of *correctio* in the actions and writings of the institutions under his rule (McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, p. 315). The connection between schooling and imperial service is also made by the Alexis poet, whose comments on the saint's early years suggest a structured career path leading to the imperial court: 'Puis ad escole li bons pedre le mist, / Tant aprist letres que bien en fut guarrit, / Puis vait li emfes l'emperethur servir.' (ll. 33-35: Then his good father sent him to school, he became very proficient in his studies, and then went to serve the emperor.)

divine, and the poet and his material. Paul Zumthor regards as crucial the relationship between text and the medieval city as a stable and well-ordered entity: 'L'écriture est la technique la mieux propre à éliminer peu à peu de cette société les nomadismes intériorisés'.²⁸ Alexis is indeed a nomad within the city, moving backwards and forwards between his bed and the church, receiving the scripture and sharing in the practices which establish him as a member of a universal community. However, the letter he writes anchors him within the elite of the city.²⁹ In spite of his self-imposed poverty, he is still able to participate in the literate culture of the class he has rejected. In this poem, the question of how the saint receives the scriptures is less important than the fact that of Christian wisdom's written origins. The saint's movement between these two locations – bed and church – might then be the model for the practices of his devotees, who must observe the holy days in the appropriate manner (ll.256-60, cited above) but who, as we shall see in the latter part of this chapter, must not be allowed to sever themselves from the secular life of the city.

The role played by scripture in this urban setting is preparatory, and it is with regard to this point that the saint and his counterpart in the *Voyage* may be placed on a continuum. Paul the Hermit, like Alexis, lived in abject poverty (though in a rural rather than urban environment), but was selected by God for accelerated entry to heaven because of his exceptional piety. There is, however, no encounter with written text anywhere in the ocean traversed by the Irish monks, implying that the textual culture of Christianity has been so thoroughly committed to memory and internalized – for example, in their recitation of prayers and singing of psalms – that the monks are required to witness wonders in order to increase their faith. Alexis, by contrast, relies upon the written word both to direct his actions and to preserve them in order that he may be identified. The verbal calls to recognize his holiness are counterpoints to this. The voice heard in Edessa drives him back to Rome, while the voice heard in Rome drives the future adherents to the cult of Alexis towards his temporary resting place, hinting at a divide between lay,

²⁸ Paul Zumthor, *La Mesure du monde: représentation de l'espace au moyen âge*, Collection Poétique (Paris: Seuil, 1993), p. 136.

²⁹ Lester K. Little's analysis of urban economic activity in the Middle Ages may not exactly map on to the representation of the Rome of late antiquity, but is still useful to this discussion in the way it defines the urban elite through the importance of language to the type of work they do: 'They did not make their living by praying, or by fighting, or by 'working', not, at least, by working with their hands. They talked; they argued; they wrote; they entertained; above all, they tried to persuade other people. Such were the defining or characteristic activities of those who prospered in the urban environment.' Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (London: Paul Elek, 1978), p. 197.

vernacular understandings of the faith and learned, Latinate ones. These extraordinary voices may be examples of the miracles required alongside the textual testament of the saint's *vita* necessary for his or her canonization.³⁰

Yet it is also significant that, while the clerk is presented as reading the letter aloud, its contents are not repeated within the poem. This is understandable from the point of view of the structural continuity of the text, as to repeat the circumstances of Alexis's life in any detail would be out of keeping with the general economy of the narrative. However, this public reading by the *clerc* can also be seen as a moment of such significance that words alone are insufficient to convey the enormity of the event; the written artefact which makes the *Vie* possible is of secondary importance to its public reception. The elevation of the performance over the written article is a reflection of medieval notions of authority: 'Literacy was not a virtue in itself. Emphasis on the word inscribed spiritually on the minds of men, as contrasted with letters written on parchment, retained its strength in the Christian message as it did in secular conveyancing ceremonies.'³¹ In this moment, the very faculty of speech seems more important than its content. The reading is part of the bridge between the divine and the mortal, as is the body to which it refers, and 'through the intervention of cleric, Pope and saint, [the audience is] drawn into the spiritual genealogy that this intervention engenders, thus being encouraged to see the text as a sacred object passed through the Church from one man of God to another.'³² The letter briefly assumes the status of relic, for its symbolic meaning and the act of its public display subordinate its content. Patrick Geary makes a clear distinction between holy relics and other significant objects such as manuscripts; there is nothing inherent to a splinter of the True Cross or a fragment of a martyr's bone to identify it as possessing any special powers.³³ The status of any object as a relic

³⁰ We might even identify a mirroring of the eleventh and twelfth centuries' increasingly standardized procedures for canonization in this part of the poem. While the production of a *vita* and evidence of miracles had already been required for centuries (though with varying degrees of rigour) in appeals for canonization, the later Middle Ages sees an ever greater reliance on papal authorization of saint's cults. In *Alexis* we see a speeded-up version of this process, and although the pope does not officially approve Alexis' sanctity in the text, his involvement in the process of revelation heavily implies the rapid completion of the process. See André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 22-32.

³¹ Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 262.

³² Emma Campbell, 'Separating the Saints from the Boys: Sainthood and Masculinity in the *Vie de saint Alexis*', *French Studies* 57, 4 (2003), 447-462 (p. 459).

³³ Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp.5-7.

depends on a supporting network of cultural associations, most importantly by being taken from a named place or person. In this, it differs from a manuscript or artwork, which has the potential to be understood outwith the context of its production or use.³⁴ Alexis's letter might therefore belong to the category of supporting evidence for the identification of a relic, rather than a relic itself, but I believe that an alternative reading of this scene is possible. The letter is both a testimonial and a contact relic, and although it is not claimed as such in the text, the hierarchical structure implicit in the difficult taking hold of the letter draws attention to its status as a privileged object. In this respect, its sharing in Alexis's holy status gives the letter an expressive power comparable to that of a reliquary, as discussed by Martina Bagnoli in the terms of 'integumentum' – it is both an extension of the saint and an intelligible proof of his greatness.³⁵ Alexis's letter becomes in this moment the point of convergence between God, the saint, and the community who hear of his sanctity. The people who flock to Eufemien's house to find the man of God can indeed identify the body, but only the saint himself can tell them his name.

However, the letter's significance is fleeting, as the connection it establishes between the body and the city (and in particular its upper echelons) completes the relationship between Alexis, his family and his city; relic status is swiftly transferred to the saint's body, and the letter is not mentioned again. Following this brief period of anonymous post-mortem repose, Alexis's movement through the text and its imagined urban topography is continued in an increasingly politicized manner, as the latter part of the poem describes the treatment of the saint's body. As the holy relic's movement stops, starts, and brings it across symbolically loaded thresholds, the disingenuousness of the poet's disdain for the status quo becomes clear, and in reading the poem we are made distinctly aware of the significance of place and order to this author.

³⁴ 'A manuscript will always have some potential significance to anyone capable of reading it, although the associations the reader may make when confronted with the text may vary depending on his cultural horizons. [...] Anyone who knows the language of the manuscript and can read the hand can appreciate the symbolic value of the text in a much more satisfactory way.' (Geary, *Furta Sacra*, pp. 5-6).

³⁵ Bagnoli, 'The Stuff of Heaven: Materials and Craftsmanship in Medieval Reliquaries', pp. 136-47 (p. 144).

3. The experience of limits

The original moment of Alexis's placing himself outside of any social hierarchy comes as he tells his wife that he is to leave the city, advising her to 'celui tien ad espus / Ki nus raens de sun sanc precius' (ll. 66-67: 'Take as your husband the one who saves us with his precious blood').³⁶ Having utterly renounced all symbols and relationships which would determine his place in the hierarchy he has left behind, he is effectively an outlaw. He rejects the honours embodied in and passed on from his father – nobility, wealth, status derived from proximity to the emperor – by choosing the religious life over the civic. When he parts from his wife, telling her of the frailty of mortal life and the need for salvation through God, he gives her a ring and his sword-belt. This gesture symbolizes his absenting himself from the world of public and private obligation, and through it he leaves himself, in terms of the social networks which previously defined him, naked and isolated.³⁷ The renunciation of property is taken further in his redistribution of the alms he receives in Edessa; prior to his being declared a saint, he is already a transmitter of favour. Campbell regards this gesture as a form of continuous renunciation which '[performs] simultaneously as a gift and as a refusal of human exchange', a 'triangulation of gift relations' through which the saint may please God.³⁸ From the point of view of civic control of worship, this refusal of exchange is potentially one of the most troubling aspects of this text, as it places divinity beyond the limits of what may be bought, sold or traded. In another sense, though, the dependence of mendicants upon urban populations serves to weave the saint into the social fabric of the city, and so even though he is at this

³⁶ This is the only scene from the *Vie de saint Alexis* illustrated in the St Albans Psalter. The central image of the three at the head of the text has the bride left alone in her chamber as Alexis steps out through the doorway, bringing to the surface the text's underlying concerns with thresholds and their transgression. The depiction of his wedding night also calls to the fore the significance of proximity to the doors of churches referred to above; one of the main functions of the many church porches erected in Rome during the twelfth century (including, coincidentally, the church of SS Alessio e Bonifacio) was as the setting for the public swearing of marriage vows prior to entry to the church to hear the Mass. In this bed-chamber scene depicted at the 'entrance' to the text, Alexis counsels his wife to dedicate herself to a heavenly husband, blurring the distinction between public and private spaces. See Nancy Spatz, 'Church Porches and the Liturgy in Twelfth-Century Rome,' in *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, ed. by Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2001), pp. 327-67.

³⁷ K. Sarah-Jane Murray notes a thematic parallel between the *Vie de saint Alexis* and Marie de France's *Yonec* illustrated by these tokens, arguing that the relatively unusual gifting of a ring and a sword in the latter is a pointed allusion through which Marie imbues the reunion of lovers in an Otherworld with a spiritual-didactic overtone. Murray, 'The Ring and the Sword: Marie de France's *Yonec* in Light of the *Vie de saint Alexis*', in *Romance Quarterly* 53, 1 (2006), 25-52.

³⁸ Campbell, *Medieval Saints' Lives*, pp. 30-31. 'It is the saint's fidelity to this paradoxical logic that ultimately enables him to establish a posthumous relationship with his family in which, rather than being a recipient of the gift, he offers them the gift of salvation.' (p. 31)

point an anonymous beggar, his place in the holy topography of the city is being prepared. He may have given up the considerable wealth and power to which he was entitled by birth, but through his redistribution of alms to other beggars he is able to participate in the spiritually beneficial charitable work so praiseworthy in the period of the poem's popularity, redeeming himself and his family alike.³⁹

In spite of this image of mutually beneficial urban relations, however, the spectre of a destabilized social order arises from the clamour of the people of Rome around the body of the saint. The search for the 'holy man', prompted by the voice of God heard throughout the city – 'Vint une voix treis feiz en la citét / Hors del sacrarie' (ll. 292–23: a voice from the sanctuary was heard three times across the city) – triggers fears of an imminent attack on Rome:

A l'altra feiz lur dist altra summunse,
Que l'ume Deu quergent ki est an Rome,
Si lui depreient que la citét ne fundet
Ne ne perissent la gent ki enz fregudent:
Ki l'un oïd, remaint en grant dute.

Sainz Innocenz ert idunc apostolie,
A lui repairent e li rice e li povre,
Si li requerent conseil d'icele cose
Qu'il unt oït, ki mult les desconfortet:
Ne guardent l'ure que terre nes encloe. (ll. 296-305)

At the same time they ['ses fedeilz', his faithful] are given another command, to seek out the man of God in Rome; they prayed to him to save the city and the people in it. All who heard it were struck with fear. Saint Innocent was pope at that time, and rich and poor alike went to seek his counsel on what they have heard, which had greatly disturbed them. They thought the earth would swallow them at any moment.

Noting in the previous quotation that while the voice comes from the 'sacrarie' (sanctuary), it is heard everywhere, it is clear that the location of the populace outside the official places of worship draws an internal distinction within the city between sacred and secular sites. The experience of anxiety, shared across different social classes, would appear to underline the message of the potential for universal acceptance into the

³⁹ Kay, *Courtly Contradictions*. pp. 72-76, 105-108. For a general survey of the sanctity of poverty, see also Paul Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), and Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy*.

Christian church. This is emphatically not a pagan city awaiting conversion, but a – *the* – Christian city, which has forgotten the legacy of its martyrs and broken faith with a world church stretching east to the cities visited by Alexis and carried on to the period of the poem's composition.⁴⁰ The fear of death and destruction reinforces the notion of Alexis as Christ-like; given the gravity of the perils facing the city, and the strong connections between Rome and St. Peter, I would argue that the auditory miracle of the thrice-heard voice is an allusion to Peter's three denials of Jesus. As Jesus' death makes possible eternal life, Alexis will both be believed to have saved the city and become a permanent reminder of the legacy of the resurrection.

The treatment of Alexis's remains in the aftermath of his death underlines the paradox behind his shift from anonymous pauper to publicly adored saint and privately mourned son. As is typical in hagiographic writing, the final lines of the poem are a call for the audience to seek the saint's intercession with God on their behalf: 'Si li preiuns que de toz mals nos tolget' (l. 622: Let us pray to him that he may deliver us from all evils). This line from the Pater Noster prepares us for the final line's confirmation (l. 625: 'En ipse verbe sin dimes Pater nostre'), and is significant in three ways. It cements Alexis's place in the liturgy, it places him alongside all believers as child of a universal father, and since the Pater Noster is a prayer for both private and public worship it appears to make the saint the property of all people at all times. However, the citizens' immediate recourse to a religious figure whose authority is legitimized by his public office makes plain the hierarchy to which they defer; when the pauper under Eufemien's stair is finally identified as the man of God, his written testament can only be removed from his hands by the pope: 'Li apostolie tent sa main a la cartre, / Sainz Alexis la süe li alascet, / Lui le consent ki de Rome ert pape' (ll. 371–73: 'The pope reaches out his hand for the letter, Saint Alexis lets it fall from his own hand, he surrenders it to the one who is pope of Rome.'). In spite of Alexis' own renunciation of wealth and office, the circumstances surrounding his recognition as a saint seem to reclaim him for the elite class to which he formerly

⁴⁰ The significance of Rome as an encoding idea is noted by Uitti in his comments on the divergent textual evidence of the Alexis legend, whose Byzantine versions frequently make him a citizen of Constantinople: 'Some of these Roman allusions are confused, and, especially when one compares the different Greek and Latin versions, one is struck by numerous inconsistencies. Invention, confusion, and mistranslation combine with obvious propaganda to make one doubt the age or authenticity of the [Graeco-Latin *Vita*'s] Roman quality. But whether 'Rome' is Rome or Constantinople, or, historically, a combination of both, need not concern us now. What is striking is the fact of Roman-ness, that is, the text's insistence upon a well-defined community, with institutions, a church, a universalist vocation, and a many-levelled social structure.' Little, pp. 40-41.

belonged.⁴¹ He may embody a radical mendicant piety, but his rejection of the social norms of his biological family does not entirely undermine the structure through which they define themselves. Eufemien is, after all, a Christian, living, owning property and exercising power in a Christian empire. Little views the popularity of the Alexis legend in the twelfth century as symptomatic of both popular and intellectual cultural conditions, under which city life and institutions are seen as corrupt, merchants dishonest, and the desire to accumulate wealth morally suspect. In general, this is a plausible point, but our poem does not advocate heroic poverty itself as much as it endorses the incorporation of a high-born mendicant into a virtually unchanged ecclesiastical superstructure. As Little suggests, participation in commerce ‘involved the danger of sin and conjured up visions of appalling punishments’, but there is virtually no ‘striving to accumulate wealth’ in the *Vie de saint Alexis*, at least not on the part of the aristocrats; as aristocrats, they simply *are* wealthy, as will be their children. Implicitly, the imminent destruction of the city is caused by the greed of ‘la main menude’, who, it is believed, can be easily bribed.⁴² The complaint in the opening lines of the poem that the virtues of the Old Testament epoch have not been maintained is a call for renewal, not revolution. Nancy Vine Durling regards the prologue’s references to Noah, Abraham and David as a key to the poem’s concerns with continuation through time and place: ‘the framework used by the clerk is [...] a genealogical one, and as such it has historical implications. The figures of the three patriarchs represent [...] a biological transfer of saintly potential; each ancestor implies the next.’⁴³

It is through close attention to the treatment of the body of the saint that we can assess the methods and motivations for the incorporation of this radically ascetic element back into the mainstream of orthodox practice. The portrayal of Alexis’s funeral procession conforms to standard procedures for the treatment of the dead, as to a medieval audience his association with a pre-existing saint places him among the most privileged sons of the city.⁴⁴ What makes this section important is how it ties in with an implied

⁴¹ Paul Strohm identifies a similar strategy in his study of coronation procedures: ‘Analysis of coronation, not as an abstract pattern but as a practice unfolding in time, reveals the orchestration of these and other legitimizing effects, and also highlights those moments when the process breaks down, when the gears and wheels of the ritual’s smooth euphemizations are revealed for all to see.’ Strohm, ‘Coronation as Legible Practice,’ in *Theory and the Premodern Text* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 33-48 (p. 38).

⁴² Little, pp. 40-41.

⁴³ Durling, p. 464.

⁴⁴ Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London: British Museum Press, 1996), pp. 57-58.

meaning to the codex as a whole; the celebration of the saint with elaborate ceremony and fine artwork is a mirror to the illustrations in the manuscript as prompts to reflection upon the life of Christ and the praise of God maintained in the psalms.⁴⁵ The tension between the old and (supposedly) new communities reaches its dramatic climax in the scenes where Alexis's body is carried through the streets of Rome. Given that the group of 'feidelz' comprises both rich and poor, and also since their widely held belief is that the discovery of Alexis has averted a potentially apocalyptic catastrophe, it is unsurprising that the people of the city should turn out *en masse* when the holy body is brought out into the street.⁴⁶ Their adoration of the saint is only intensified by intervention of the nobles who attempt to buy them off:

Trestuz li prenent ki pourent avenir,
Cantant enportent le cors saint Alexis
E ço li preient que d'els aiet mercit ;
N'estot somondre icels ki l'unt oït,
Tuit i acorent, nes li enfant petit.

Si s'en commourent tota la gent de Rome,
Plus tost i vint ki plus tost i pout curre,
Par mi les rues an venent si granz turbes,
Ne reis ne quons n'i poet faire entrarote
Ne le saint cors ne pourent passer ultra.

Entr'els an prennent cil seinor a parler:
'Granz est la presse, nus n'i poduns passer,
Pur cest saint cors que Deus nus ad donét
Liez est li poples ki tant l'a desirrét,
Tuit i acorent, nuls ne s'en volt turner.'

Cil an repondent ki l'ampirie bailissent:
'Mercit seniurs, nus an querreuns mecine,
De noz aveirs feruns granz departies,
La main menude ki l'almosne desiret,
S'il nus funt presse, ui an ermes delivres.'

De lur tresors prenent l'or e l'argent,
Sil funt jeter devant la povre gent,
Par iço quident aver discumbrement:

⁴⁵ Bagnoli, 'The Stuff of Heaven', pp. 144-45; Camille, 'Philological Iconoclasm', pp. 372-75; Hahn, *Portrayed on the Heart*, pp. 44-45, 48-49.

⁴⁶ We might see this as a prelude to the ritual processions of relics of the later Middle Ages, which Andrew Brown views as semi-theatrical affirmations of a civic spiritual identity, and which increased in frequency during periods of hardship (Brown, 'Perceptions of Relics: Civic Religion in Late Medieval Bruges,' in *Images of Medieval Sanctity: Essays in Honour of Gary Dickson*, ed. by Debra Higgs Strickland (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 185-205.

Ed els que valt? cil n'en rovent nient,
A cel saint hume trestut est lur talent.

Ad une voiz crïent la gent menude:
'De cest avoir certes nen avum cure,
Si grant ledece nus est apareüde
D'ïcest saint cors, n'avum soin d'autre mune,
Car par cestui averum nus bone aiude.' (ll. 506–35)

Everyone who was able took him up, singing as they carried the body of Saint Alexis, and praying for his mercy on them; there was no need to call out those who heard them, for all ran out to him, even little children. Then all the people of Rome rushed out as fast as their legs would carry them. The crowds in the streets were so large that no king or lord could find a way through them, nor could the holy body pass through. These lords began to talk among themselves: 'The crowd is so great that we cannot pass through it. The people are so happy God has given us this holy body that they have all come out. None of them wants to miss it.' The imperial governors replied: 'Forgive us, our lords, we are trying to put things right. We will give away our possessions to the simple folk looking for alms if they crowd us, and then we will be free to move.' They took gold and silver from their funds and threw them in front of the poor people, thinking this would clear their way. But what does this achieve? They did not want the money – all they wanted was this holy man. With one voice the crowd cried: 'We have no wish for this treasure, for such great joy has been revealed to us in this holy body that we have no care for any other thing, and we will have good succour through it.'

This gesture on the part of the lords of the city is a self-interested economic strategy masquerading as a gift. In an optimistic light, throwing their money to the poor might be interpreted as an imitation of the saint's redistribution of his alms, a view supported by the reference to 'l'almosne' (l. 524). However, if we compare this with the triangulated model of gift-giving proposed by Campbell, the rationale of the nobles is clearly different to that of Alexis. Where the saint continually gives away his money and possessions for the glory of God and eternal reward after death, the lords give away their wealth in the expectation of immediate benefit. In this sense, and in spite of their being Christian and desiring proximity to a Christian saint, they are analogous to the pagans of the martyr lives who are uniformly baffled at the notion of rewards for faithful worship deferred to the afterlife.⁴⁷ Their attempts to move Alexis's body away from the streets where its

⁴⁷ In this parallel, we may see the work of containment as comparable to Žižek's description of pagan cosmology: 'The very core of pagan Wisdom lies in its insight into this cosmic balance of hierarchically ordered Principles – more precisely, into the eternal circuit of the cosmic catastrophe (derailment) and the restoration of Order through just punishment.' (*The Fragile Absolute*, p. 110). In this respect, the truly

progress has been halted can be read as a desire to privatize the veneration of the saint. By bringing his remains to an enclosed, interior location they make access to the body easier to police.⁴⁸ For the 'povre gent' Alexis is a means to aid and comfort; this reverses the sequence of transmission in Alexis' almsgiving, since by indirectly honouring God through their charity to his servant they are also to be the recipients of God's favour in the form of miracles performed in the presence of his body. These contrasting models of gift relations draw a distinction between the direct and the mediated relationships between the saint and, respectively, the general public and the nobility.⁴⁹ The narrator's implied criticism of the nobles and championing of the 'povre gent' in this scene apparently represents a shift from a social order organized around inherited wealth and status to one in which all participants in the cult of Alexis are, theoretically at least, equal. The death – and *Life* – of Alexis has, it would appear, shattered the previous order by breaking off Eufemien's aristocratic dynasty and transforming his family's conception of eternal survival from one based in the continuous production of heirs who will assume their father's place (ensuring that there will always be a father) to one in which paternal power attributed to God renders all believers sons, equal in their potential access to the riches of heaven. To return to a figure alluded to earlier in the poem, we might reflect on the radical iconoclasm inherent in Paul's interpretation of the meaning of Christianity. Alain Badiou's study of Paul's significance in establishing and supporting the church reads the apostle as promoting the revolutionary nature of Christ's life on earth, which is potentially comparable to the outcome of the discovery of Alexis:

Pour Paul, l'émergence de l'instance du fils est absolument *nouveau*. La formule selon laquelle Dieu nous a envoyé son fils signifie d'abord une intervention dans l'Histoire, par laquelle elle est, non plus gouvernée par un calcul transcendant selon les lois d'une durée, mais, comme le dira Nietzsche, «cassée en deux». L'envoi (la naissance) du fils nomme cette cassure. Que la

revolutionary nature of Christianity has not been fully realized by the Christians in *Alexis*, as it involves total rejection of the notion of this 'cosmic balance': 'Christianity asserts as the highest act precisely what pagan wisdom condemns as the source of Evil: the gesture of separation, of drawing the line, of clinging to an element that disturbs the balance of All.' (p. 112). Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute, or Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London and New York: Verso, 2008).

⁴⁸ As has previously been seen in ll. 292-3, the voice of God is heard coming from a specific sanctified place, implying the connection between builders of institutions and the deity honoured through such materialist acts of faith.

⁴⁹ On the role of gesture in this work of social boundary maintenance, see Jean-Claude Schmitt, 'The rationale of gestures in the West: third to thirteenth centuries', in *A Cultural History of Gesture: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. by Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge: Polity, 1993), pp. 59-70 (pp.66-67).

référence soit le fils, et non le père, nous enjoint de ne plus nous confier à aucun discours qui prétende à la forme de la maîtrise.⁵⁰

For Paul, the emergence of the instance of the son is essentially tied to the conviction that 'Christian discourse' is absolutely new. The formula according to which God sent us his Son signifies primarily an intervention within History, one through which it is, as Nietzsche will put it, "broken in two," rather than governed by a transcendent reckoning in conformity with the laws of an epoch. The sending (birth) of the son names this rupture. That it is the son, not the father, who is exemplary, enjoins us not to put our trust any longer in any discourse laying claim to the form of mastery.

This radical restructuring of the order of discourse is not, I would argue, borne out in the *Vie de saint Alexis*. In examining the treatment of Alexis' body, we may conclude that the revitalization of Christian worship desired by the narrator is more conservative than this. 'Christian discourse', as discussed in the previous section, does not represent the absolutely new in the context of Alexis's Rome; on the contrary, for the saint's generation and those generations who follow it alike, discourse characterized as 'écriture' received in the church is fundamentally continuous, a means of reaching back to the 'tens ancïenur'. It is a discourse which seems closer to Eneas's repeatedly retold story of the origins and victimhood of the Trojans than to the letters of Paul which demand a radically unworldly form of worship and institute a community united by faith rather than ethnicity or geographical origin.

That is not to say that the *Vie de saint Alexis* disavows universality or equality in the eyes of God. As the poet insists in the epilogue, the saint's intercessory power is available to all through prayer. But in spite of the popular devotion to Alexis demonstrated in the lines above, it is clear that ecclesiastical protocol is the determining factor in directing the form of the cult and containing the threat of revolutionary violence arising from these limitations. As I have argued, the singling out of the pope as the first recipient of Alexis' letter privileges institutional hierarchy. It is not enough for the letter to be given to just any Christian, not even the saint's father and benefactor. Similarly, the reaction of the nobles to the prodigious miracles occurring around Alexis' body betrays the desire for official control of it:

⁵⁰ Badiou, *Saint Paul: la fondation de l'universalisme*, Les Essais du Collège International de Philosophie (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), p.46 ; trans. by Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 42-43.

Cil dui seniur ki l'empirie guvernent,
 Quant il i veient les vertuz si apertes,
 Il le receivent, sil portent e sil servent:
 Alques par pri, e le plus par podeste,
 Vunt en avant, si derumpent la presse.

Sainz Boneface, cui l'um martir apelet,
 Aveit an Rome une eglise mult bele,
 Iloec an portent danz Alexis a certes,
 Aaptement le posent a la terre:
 Felix le liu u sun saint cors herberget.

La gent de Rome ki tant l'unt desirrét
 Seat jurz le tenent sor terre a podestét;
 Grant est la presse, ne l'estuet demander:
 De tute parz l'unt si avirunét,
 C'est avis unches hom n'i poet habiter. (ll. 561–75)

When two of the imperial governors saw such impressive miracles they took him up and pledged themselves to him. With a little pleading and a lot of force, they pushed their way forward through the crowd. There was a very beautiful church in Rome dedicated to the martyr Saint Boniface, and they swiftly carried lord Alexis there, gently placing him on the ground. Happy is the place where his holy body lies. The people of Rome, who so dearly wished to be near him, forcibly ensured that his body remained there for seven days. The crowd was enormous, it goes without saying. They had surrounded it so completely that it's plain no man could approach it.

Again, we see the tension between the ruling class and the wider population who form an almost impenetrably dense mass around the source of miracles; having failed to reassert their dominance through bribery and pleading, the governors are compelled to use force to achieve their ends. The transportation of Alexis' body, still directed by imperial officials, sees it being brought to a church which already has an association with a saint. This has the effect of further legitimizing Alexis' saintliness, first of all by bringing him to rest in a sanctified place, and second, through the implied incorporation into a community of saints. If martyrs such as Catherine represent the dramatic break from previous religious tradition, the ascetic sits alongside them as a reminder of the need to maintain the new faith. Nevertheless, Alexis' nascent cult must not be allowed to flourish in spaces outwith the control of the church, and the throng of believers, who bring the process of institutionalizing the saint to a halt, cannot be tolerated for long. We might surmise that one of the principal reasons for this need to break up the crowd is that the

life of the metropolis, so recently threatened by destruction through an act of God, is once again at risk from the cessation of economically productive activity. The stasis of the crowd is a worrying portent of the stagnation of urban life. This is a narrative in which the identification and preservation of the 'correct' forms of civic and religious life is of paramount importance.

The continuing conflict between the public's desire for physical closeness to the body and the church officials' adherence to form and legitimization reaches a climax in the account of Alexis' funeral:

Al sedme jurn fu faite la herberge
 A cel saint cors, a la gemme celeste;
 En sus s'en traient, si alascet la presse,
 Voillent o nun sil laissent metra an terre:
 Ço peiset els, mais altre ne puet estra.

Ad ancensers, ad oriés candelabres
 Clers revestuz an albes ed an capes
 Metent le cors enz un sarqueu de marbre:
 Alquant i cantent, li pluisur jetent lairmes,
 Ja le lur voil de lui ne desevrassent.

D'or e de gemmes fut li sarqueus parez
 Pur cel saint cors qu'il i deivent poser:
 Metent l'en terre par vive poestét,
 Pluret li seigles de Rome la cité,
 Ne fu nuls om kis puisset akeser.

Or n'estot dire del pedra e de la medra
 E de la spuse, cum il s'en doloserent,
 Quer tuit en unt lor voiz si atempredes
 Que tuit le plainstrent e tuit le regreteirent:
 Cel jurn i out cent mil lairmes pluredes.

Desure terre nel pourent mais tenir,
 Voilent o non, sil laissent enfodir,
 Prenent congét al cors saint Alexis:
 'E! sire, pere, de nos aies mercit,
 Al tun seignur nos seies boens plaidiz.' (ll. 576-600)

On the seventh day the home for this holy body, this heavenly jewel, was ready. They lifted [the body] up, and the crowd let it go, whether they wished it or not it will be placed in the earth. It saddened them, but it cannot be any other way. With censers and golden candelabra, and dressed in white ceremonial robes and cloaks, clerics placed the body in a marble coffin. Some

sang, most wept, they wished never to be parted from him. The coffin where they must put this holy body was decorated with gold and jewels. It took great effort to put it in the ground, the people of the city of Rome wept, there was no comforting them. Now there is no need to tell of the sorrow of his father, mother and wife, for they had a single voice in weeping and mourning him: that day, a hundred thousand tears were shed. They could no longer keep him above the ground, and willingly or otherwise they let him be buried, they take their leave of the body of Saint Alexis: 'Ah! Lord, father, have mercy on us, and speak well to your lord on our behalf.'

This tearful moment of severance recalls the earlier scene where the people of Rome are driven to find Alexis in order to save their city from being swallowed by the earth (l. 305: 'Ne guardent l'ure que terre nes encloe'). While the previous scene marks the beginning of the public sanctification of Alexis, the burial of his body seals this process, effectively restoring normality to the life of the city and ending the 'effervescent' stage of the cult. The removal of this miraculous body from public view, against the wishes of the people, is a means for bringing both the saint and his followers under control, and the call to the saint which accompanies their departure from the scene institutes a more appropriate (i.e. conducive to civic life) form of worship.

In the treatment of his body following his death, the saint's original journey into anonymous obscurity has been reversed. Donald Maddox reads the account of Alexis' burial as 'tangible evidence to buttress the people's faith in the saint's new intercessory rôle'; I would go further than this, and suggest that, viewed in the context of the preceding scenes of popular devotional frenzy, it not only supports but prescribes the image of Alexis as an intercessor to be reached through prayer and admiration of the splendid coffin (an experience amplified by the church paraphernalia) rather than through physical contact.⁵¹ In his comparison of L and A, Maddox suggests that while the latter privileges the textual basis of the cult (i.e. Alexis' testimonial letter), the former privileges the corporeal relic, but this, I believe, downplays the extent to which the relic is brought under ecclesiastical control and thereby 'textualized'. There are no further references or allusions to miracles once the body has been brought into the church, and the physical

⁵¹ Maddox, p. 153. See also Hahn: 'The senses here are not, as one might think, bedazzled by the jewels and thereby distracted by their glittering earthly presence [...] such "looking" is also a rewarding experience.' ('Metaphor and Meaning in Early Medieval Reliquaries', in *Seeing the Invisible in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. by Giselle de Nie, Karl F. Morrison and Marco Mostert Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp.239-63 (p. 251).)

barriers put in place by the coffin and burial of the body bring this charismatic phase of the cult to an early and much resented close. The characterization of the holy body as ‘gemme celeste’ is matched by the adornment of the coffin, making the saint synonymous with containment and barriers, and simultaneously acting as conduit and shield between the mortal and the eternal.⁵² The spectacle of the funeral, traumatic as it appears to be to those who witness it, enacts a burial of the impulse towards total abandonment of worldly matters.

If this reading is valid, then the representation of the community of faith in the final stanzas must also be reassessed. Alexis’ family’s loss of the means for biological reproduction is compensated with the gift of eternal life, but though their grief is shared with the other Christians at the burial (ll. 591–95), they appear to leave the scene on their own:

Vait s’en li pople, e le pere e la medra
 E la pulcela unches ne desevrerent,
 Anseble furent, jusqu’a Deu s’en ralerent:
 Lur cumpainie fut bone ed honorethe,
 Par cel saint cors sunt lur anames salvedes. (ll. 601–05)

The people went away, and the father and mother and maiden were never separated, they remained together until they returned to God: their company was good and honoured, through this holy body their souls were saved.

The family with whom the narrative began are finally inseparable, and their salvation through their devotion to the saint means that their newly devout ‘cumpainie’, though denied any means of reproduction, is assured of a place in heaven. This would appear to be the ultimate comment on the social structure implied by the saint’s retreat from the world, as they are now joined by shared faith as much as they were previously connected through their shared loss.

Nevertheless, we might infer a division between the ‘pople’, characterized as being in motion, and the family, who appear to be static and whose only movement in this stanza is their journey towards God. Referring back to the miniature image of Alexis leaving the

⁵² Bagnoli, ‘The Stuff of Heaven’, p.138.

house, we recall the chaste bride left at centre of image at beginning in pose of grief (her hand partially covers her face); with Eufemien and his wife, she returns to the central point of having no means to continue her line, and no place to go other than heaven. In a manner of speaking, the saint's family is monumentalized, associated with the architecture of a sterile domesticity. The miniature's depiction of Alexis passing through the door as he sets out, meanwhile, may point forward to the properly conducted death ritual since, as Paul Binski indicates, doorways and portals are prominent images on tombs of the period of the psalter.⁵³ This interest in the maintenance of orthodox ritual performance may account for the choice to illustrate this scene rather than the more commonly depicted episodes of the saint below the stairs and the taking of the letter from his hands.⁵⁴

This tableau of family mourners contrasts with the return to everyday activity of the other citizens. Following their week-long vigil around Alexis' body as it lay in the church, the people of Rome once again become mobile, and leave the newly enshrined saint behind them. In spite of the unflattering portraits of the governors who offer bribes and use force to gain access to the holy body, the final image of a patrician Rome redolent of a pre-Christian social structure is Eufemien and his family, who have finally grasped the significance of their gift from God. According to Žižek's reading of Fellini's *Satyricon*, the film's universe is pervaded by the melancholy born of the knowledge that redemption is not yet possible. The definition of melancholy he offers may, ironically, be applicable to the continuing condition of Alexis's family, as the poem implies that the closest version of Paradise on earth is an orderly society whose hierarchy is maintained across successive generations. This is the form of Paradise they are denied, since their lost son is irreplaceable and the end of their genealogical line inevitable: 'melancholy is not primarily directed at the paradisiacal past of organic balanced Wholeness which was lost due to some catastrophe, it is not a sadness caused by this loss; melancholy proper, rather, designates the attitude of those who are still in Paradise but are already longing to break out of it: of those who, although still in a closed universe, already possess a vague premonition of another dimension which is just out of their reach, since they came a little

⁵³ Binski, *Medieval Death*, pp.29-30.

⁵⁴ See, for example, the eleventh-century wall painting at San Clemente in Rome, which depicts Eufemien failing to recognize Alexis, the pope's discovery of the dead saint, and Alexis's family mourning around his body (reproduced in Geddes, p. 62).

bit too early...'.⁵⁵ While they do not experience anything like the miraculous cures of those afflicted with blindness, paralysis, leprosy or other complaints (ll. 551-5), the prize for their faith in the saint is eternal life. They embody the transfer of reward from this life to the next, bringing them closer to the saint and to God than any of the unfortunates healed in the street. What this seems to imply is a two-tier model of devotional engagement within the Christian community. The named representatives of the social stratum Alexis left behind in his decoupling from the world are finally able to share in his view of this life as transient and insignificant, but the populace, awestruck by the miracles and disappointed by their limited access to the saint, can only conceive of Alexis' powers to speak for them. Piously-inspired observance of proper form is proof against real revolution, as well as an opportunity for Romans of all social strata to regain something of the goodness of a previous age; this observance of orthodox practice is exemplified in the conduct of the saint's family, who are more imitable than Alexis himself. Ultimately, the certainty of salvation attached to the ascetic life is not available to all, since, while ascetic saints like Alexis have their uses in the practice of faith, the complete dissociation from social networks implied in imitation of this form of devotion is incompatible with secular urban life. The relationship between the believer and the divine must be mediated in order to mirror the relationship between this life and the next.

Conclusion

The *Vie de saint Alexis* is, then, as much a tale of a city as of a saint. Benson's view of souvenirs of Rome as building blocks for an 'eternal city' of the imagination can be extended to the complex and sometimes contradictory textual remnants of the legend of Alexis, as indeed the relics of saints are material for the faithful to gain a tangible experience of divinity.⁵⁶ Through a close reading of our poem's movements of people and objects out of and into the city, through its streets, and within its buildings, we gain an impression of a fictionalized Rome whose author grants it just enough revolution to be

⁵⁵ *The Fragile Absolute*, pp. 80-81.

⁵⁶ 'The seeing in fragments encouraged by souvenirs led in two directions: into a past that could be reconstructed and a future in which new monuments would be built on the principles delineated and isolated from ancient fragments.' Benson, p. 28.

able to survive. One of the key markers of this durable status quo is the valorization of written text, which is both a means of transmission and a signifier of social prestige. The *Vie de saint Alexis* sees a reversal of the voice/logos relationship emerging in *Christina*, wherein the culture of writing represented by the pagan father and letter-writing Roman officials is overturned by the spectacular, charismatic spirituality embodied in the saint. In *Alexis*, there is a brief period of public celebration and interruption of the received order, characterized by miracles and the heavenly voice picking out Alexis for sainthood. However, this is brought to a close by the institutional reclamation of his body, the relic of one who, under different circumstances, would have formed part of the social stratum defining the shape of the new cult. More than just prescribing routine practices for the orthodox and reminding them of the powers of a saintly intercessor, *Alexis* L also implies the necessity of a powerful, literate cadre consisting of citizens like Eufemien and headed by papal and imperial authorities to regulate these practices from one generation to the next. The 'povre gent', we might infer from the poem, cannot be trusted not to slip into unorthodox practices such as demanding unmediated contact with the body of the saint. The reader is presented with a narrative experience celebrating private devotion and participation in both regular and extraordinary public encounters with the divine, leaving us in no doubt as to which is more desirable. The locations for worship, meanwhile, are re-affirmed, making the properly preserved saints orientation points in a city particularly open to multiple interpretations.

Chapter 6

Seeking a Legible Surface: From the Wardrobe to the Page in the *Vie de sainte Marie l’Egyptienne*

El recevoit plusors presens,
S’en acatoit bons vestemens,
Bons dras avoit et avenans
Por mix plaisir a ses amans.
El n’avoit soing de dras de laine,
Au pior jor de la semaine,
Bon bliaut avoit d’ostorin
Et affubloit mantel d’ermin.
Soullers bien pains de corduam
Cauchoit a tous les jors de l’an.¹ (ll. 193-202)

She received many gifts, which she used to buy good clothes. She had good and attractive clothes, all the better to please her lovers. She did not care for woollen clothes; every day of the week she wore a fine silken tunic with an ermine mantle. On her feet she wore fine shoes of painted Cordoban leather every day.

Dr Twarden: You know, Lee, there’s a long history of this in Catholicism. The monks used to wear thorns on their temples, and the nuns, they wore them sewn inside their clothing. You are part of a great tradition. Who’s to say love needs to be soft and gentle?²

Luxury clothing, as E. Jane Burns has argued, emblemizes a powerful counter-current to romance writing’s concerns with normative courtly identity. No mere props to stereotyped depictions of wealth and privilege, these fine textiles and glittering jewels speak of a co-dependent relationship between western Europe and the eastern Mediterranean and the lands beyond.³ These prestige commodities contribute to the formation of what Burns calls the ‘sartorial body’, that is, an entity constituted by the

¹ Quotations in French are from versions T and O in *La Vie de sainte Marie l’Egyptienne: versions en ancien et en moyen français*, ed. by Peter Dembowski, Publications romanes et françaises (Geneva: Droz, 1977), unless otherwise stated. English translations are my own.

² *Secretary*, dir. Steven Shainberg (2002).

³ E. Jane Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading Through Clothes in Medieval French Culture*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). See also Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp. 77-104.

reading-together of the flesh-and-blood body and the objects in which it is clothed.⁴ The sartorial dimension to the romance-inflected anonymous *Vie de sainte Marie l'Egyptienne* (late twelfth century) enlivens its account of sin, repentance and salvation in several important respects. From Mary's luxurious wardrobe in Alexandria to the hair shirts of the Palestinian monks and on to the unconventional burial shroud of the saint, the poem's close attention to clothing – what it looks like, where it comes from, and how it is treated – is closely linked to its representation of narrative practice and, ultimately, textual transmission. The sartorial body is also, I propose, the readable, narrateable body.

The means by which this text represents boundaries and limits may be compared with the evolving relationship between Lee and Edward in Steven Shainberg's *Secretary*, a film about the search for forms of sexual and emotional contact which are mutually acceptable to these two eccentric and difficult characters. Lee's immobile 'hunger strike' – itself reminiscent of ascetic piety, as her therapist points out to her – mirrors Mary's submission to the divine voice compelling her to wander the desert, and she demonstrates the same kind of self-effacing devotion as the saint. Her obedience of Edward's apparently arbitrary command to sit with her hands on his desk and her feet on the floor until he returns demonstrates the connection between love and physical discomfort in a similar way to her relationship with the dress she wears. The too-tight wedding dress she wears in this episode – like the too-large bridesmaid's dress she wears for her sister's wedding at the beginning of the film – signifies an alternative to the perceived norms of marital love by using highly conventional costumes which do not fit their wearer. Mary's own love story, which culminates with her calling to God 'M'ame et mon cors conmant a toi' (l. 1293) as she lies down to die, can only be fulfilled with the intervention of Zosimas; subsequently, he 're-clothes' her life by narrating it for his fellow hair-shirt-clad monks, reminding them – and us – that, just as love may be expressed and experienced in unexpected ways, there are multiple routes to heaven.

In starting from images of clothing in the *Vie de sainte Marie l'Egyptienne*, this chapter explores the ways in which these material forms contain and convey aspects of spiritual

⁴ Burns, p. 12: 'These sartorial bodies are not tangible objects with an independent existence in literary texts. They emerge from a reading practice that conceives of clothes as an active force in generating social bodies.'

and social identity. They can, I believe, function as metaphors for the text's concerns with the various ways in which people come together – socially, sexually, commercially – but they are also potent objects embodying these forms of contact. Following on from Burns's arguments for the integral part played by eastern commodities in the formation of western elite identities, this chapter will analyse the poem's representation of the eastern Mediterranean world and how perceptions of this setting inter-relate with its themes and characterization. The 'romanced' life of Mary draws the saint's phases of urban sin and desert redemption in particularly vivid shades, and its concern with the visual reflects its parallel interests in narrative closure and physical enclosure.

1. The Mediterranean saint, in motion and at rest

The textual dressing (or, to return to the term used in chapter 1, *integumentum*) of the story of Mary of Egypt in the T version requires an awareness of how this poem restructures its source and moves the glamorous, cosmopolitan Mary to centre stage. There are two distinct strands to the interpretations of the life of Mary of Egypt. The older of these follows the earliest known life in Greek by Sophronios (first half of the seventh century), upon which later medieval *vitae* and several of the French versions of the life are modelled. In this version, the narrative begins with Zosimas, a monk who is pious and devoted to God, but is reproached by his abbot for his pride, and is instructed to go to the monastery by the river Jordan. Keen to find someone who is even closer to perfection than himself, he goes into the desert, where he meets Mary. In the second strand, established by our poem (hereafter referred to as T) and followed by the thirteenth-century *Vie* by Rutebeuf and the version recounted by Voragine in the *Legenda aurea*, the narrative begins with Mary's youthful rebellion and her life of prostitution in Alexandria. It proceeds chronologically through her journey to Jerusalem, her conversion, entry into the desert and her four and a half decades of gruelling penance and solitude. Zosimas only appears at the point when, as Mary believes, God wants her to be revealed to him. From this point on, the two traditions are fairly similar, but these distinct narrative frameworks invite numerous questions about where the saint is located in the text and how she makes her first impression on the reader. This question of Mary's

location within the structure of the poem can be fruitfully analysed alongside her geographical dislocations and the movements of other figures in the text to shed new light on this poet's concern with space and boundaries. By opening with a reflection on endings it links practices of narration with its spiritual and didactic message:

Quant il est venus au morir,
 A tart se prent au repentir.
 Selonc les dis saint Augustin
 N'est mie bone icele fin,
 Car quant li caitis sent le mort,
 Il ne puet faire droit ne tort.
 Guerpist le male iniquité,
 Car il n'en a mais poosté,
 Se plus i eüst de se vie
 Encore fesist il folie. (ll. 41-50)

When [the sinner] is close to death, it is too late to repent. According to Saint Augustine this is not a good end, for when the wretch is nearing death, he is not able to act, either to do right or wrong. The bad one only gives up sinning because he no longer has the power to do it, but if he had longer to live he would continue to sin.

The life of the mortal is necessarily characterized by sin, the prologue suggests, and so it must also involve repentance, hinting forward to a protagonist who will have much to repent. Furthermore, this repentance must not be delayed until the point of death. Suffering in the present is essential for glory and redemption later; this could just as easily be the underlying moral of quest narrative as of the lives of the saints. This is an especially pertinent point given that in one of the six manuscripts containing T it follows Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte du Graal* and the First and Second Continuations.⁵ While the notion that the saint's life is a form of quest narrative is far from original, the pairing of the romance with this particular version of the Mary legend – and, along with two of the romance's continuations, they are the only texts in this manuscript – is potentially very suggestive. Why have an unfinished romance and two inconclusive continuations followed by a text like the *Vie de sainte Marie l'Egyptienne*, which is so deeply concerned with endings? I would argue that this question leads back to reflection on narrative practice in T which, though much shorter than the *Conte du Graal*, is no less provocative in terms of its struggle with notions of self-definition and the desire for perfection.

⁵ London, British Museum, add. 36614 (second half of the thirteenth century).

The rearrangement of the Latin life in our vernacular product brings it closer to the structure of other popular ascetic lives, such as the *Vie de saint Alexis*, where the saint's life is presented chronologically as the main narrative thread of the poem. This narration brings it in line with the tendencies of later medieval hagiographic writing, and also with some of the conventions of romance writing.⁶ T's lengthy description of Mary's beauty and condemnation of her transgressive behaviour, can, and frequently has, been read as misogynistic.⁷ However, this undoubted romance influence also lends a dual aspect to how the life of the saint is received, first by the medieval audience and then by the confessor whose intervention marks the imminent end of her penance and her being judged worthy of entry to Paradise. In this interpretation Mary's life is both a framed, 'confessed', narrative, and a witnessed journey whose turning point is an epiphanic moment of self-realization.

As an aside to the consideration of what vernacular manuscripts containing the *Vie de sainte Marie l'Egyptienne* suggest about how the text was read, we see a particularly interesting combination of texts in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 837. It contains Rutebeuf's *Vie Marie l'Egipcienne* as well as a large number of short pieces, including fabliaux, parodies of the Credo and Pater Noster, and miracle tales, believed to have been compiled as a collection of performance pieces.⁸ Among these is 'Du Mantel mautailié', the Arthurian tale from which the title of this thesis is taken. The relationship between clothing and truth is central to this text and to the legend of Mary of Egypt; the saint refuses to speak directly to Zosimas until he has given her a robe with which to cover herself up. In both the *conte* and the *Vie*, the clothed body reveals more than the naked one.⁹

⁶ Duncan Robertson, 'Twelfth-Century Literary Experience: The Life of St. Mary the Egyptian', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 22. 1 (1987), 71-77.

⁷ Patricia Cox Miller views the early legends of saints Mary and Pelagia, another repentant prostitute, as troubling to notions of sanctity founded upon typically masculine virtues, generating barely comprehensible grotesques: 'as harlots typically did in the Roman imagination, Mary and Pelagia cross forbidden boundaries between domestic, private, female-gendered space and public, male-gendered space [...] The grotesque violates categories and threatens to de-center cultural norms.' Miller, 'Is There a Harlot in This Text? Hagiography and the Grotesque', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 33. 3 (2003), 419-35 (p. 429). See also Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, pp.212-19.

⁸ Busby, *Codex and Context*, I, 439-43.

⁹ 'The search for the virtuous woman in "Du Mantel mautailié", tends, through what seems like yet another antimatrimonial satire, to obscure the more serious question of where exactly virginity can be found – a question that obsessed the early church fathers and bears crucially [...] upon the later courtly constitution

In what is perhaps a nod to the increasingly preferred practice of penance tailored to the individual sinner, Mary performs a personalized penalty which mirrors her particular sins.¹⁰ Her punishment – wandering the desert without shelter for the remainder of her life – parallels her pre-epiphanic restlessness, and sin and redemption are joined together to indicate the Christian's penitential work towards salvation, as Michael Uebel observes:

In order to achieve salvation, the anchorite must reinscribe his existence as a constant state of becoming. For the anchorite, who must again and again move not so much away from society as toward the presence of God, in its full intensity and immediacy, the work of flight is never done.¹¹

Her early life in Egypt, the region of the desert fathers, is marked by her rejection of the authority of her Christian parents and her devotion to self-gratification, a point in which she is unexpectedly similar to Alexis in his departure from his family on his wedding night (though she has a very different form of gratification in mind). Her onward travel to Alexandria, like the subsequent journey from the port city to the Holy Land, is emphatically unidirectional; once she has left these places, we are told, she never sees them again. Nevertheless, these two journeys may be differentiated in one important respect. She goes to overland to Alexandria alone, but seventeen years later she continues across the sea with a group of pilgrims who have set off from Libya and docked in Alexandria en route to Jerusalem. This trajectory, including the intervening period in Alexandria, illustrates the ever-increasing damage Mary's actions do to social relations. First, she breaks up her own family by leaving them and refusing their offers to find her a wealthy husband (ll. 79-96). Then, in Alexandria, her indifference to the deaths and injuries resulting from disputes among her countless clients indicates her wilful ignorance of the consequences of conflict among the many men who desire her; she does not care to visit those who are injured courting her favour, as she has a constant stream of new company (ll. 141-44). On the ship, she is enclosed still more tightly with her sins, yet remains as ignorant of the perils of the sea as of the judgement to be passed on her actions:

of woman as an unattainable ideal.' R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 97.

¹⁰ On the emerging theology of personal confession, see John W. Baldwin, *Masters, Princes and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and His Circle*, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), I, 47-59.

¹¹ Uebel, 'Medieval Desert Utopia', *Exemplaria*, 14. 1 (2002), 1-45 (pp. 12-13).

Quant ele vit les hautes ondes
 Desmesurees et parfondes,
 Et ele voit le grant oré
 Qui amenoit le tempesté,
 Li cors de li estoit tant liés,
 De riens ne cremoit ses pekiés. (ll. 307-12)

When she saw the towering waves, deep and enormous, and saw the great storm driving the tempest, she was so happy, she did not fear for her sins at all.

We can infer from this passage's description of the extreme conditions suffered at sea that she ought to both be afraid and see a connection between the raging storm and her own sinful actions. While the men seem to heed the prologue's advice regarding the horror of dying before confession, Mary is oblivious to their fear. Her only preoccupation is sensual pleasure, and her commitment to hedonism pushes any awareness of the passage of time or of the effects of her actions to the margins of her consciousness. Lacking any temporal dimension to her existence, she has no means of representing herself to herself. In all of her time in Alexandria she only seems to laugh, never to speak (at least until she makes her plans to leave), and she is routinely characterized by her desire for company and her ceaseless motion:

Tant l'avoit diale esprise,
 Toute nuit iert en chemise ;
 Ele n'iert mie tote le nuit
 Nient seulement en un lit,
 Por parfaire a tos ses delis
 Aloit le nuit par tous les lis.
 Cil le voloient de bon gré
 Qui en fissent lor volenté.
 Merveille iert d'une feme seule
 Ki pooit souffrir si grant foule.' (ll. 315-24)

The devil had so thoroughly possessed her that she spent the whole night in her undershirt; she did not spend the night in one bed alone, but, to satisfy her desires, went from one bed to another all night long. The men were happy with this, and did as they pleased with her. It was a wonder that one woman alone could endure so many men.

Within the space of the ship, Mary is able to roam freely, and the mention of her as ‘une feme seule’ underlines the gendered distinction between her and the other passengers. Her activity – coyly denoted by reference to what she wears rather than what she does – is a continuation of how she had behaved in Alexandria, and the valuation of her as an apparently inexhaustible source of male pleasure is reaffirmed.¹² While the terrified men are confined to their beds, Mary’s fearlessness, interpreted by Judith Weiss as an element of a particularly literary form of madness, means she can occupy as many beds as she likes.¹³ Here, motion precludes reflection, and it is Mary’s lack of care for consequences which heightens the sense of her impending damnation. Her distress at the ship’s arrival at its destination sustains the connection between her pleasure and her need for both company and movement (ll. 331-34); she soon returns to her ‘mestier’ in a bid to overcome her apprehension at being in an unfamiliar land.

In addition to the account of her sexual activity, the shifting terms of reference to Mary’s companions are further indicators of her affective powers. When she first approaches her travelling companions she addresses them as ‘pelerins’, but on the ship they are referred to by the narrator as ‘jovencels’, ‘espous’ or ‘bachelers’. She is a corrupting influence, distracting the young and/or married men from the object of their pilgrimage (whatever that may be) but, notably, the terms used to describe them while she is in their presence refer to relational social roles.¹⁴ The particularly social aspects of their identities contrast with Mary’s claims to having no ties to anyone as she negotiates her place on the ship:

‘Je sui chi une povre feme,

¹² Her being ‘en chemise’ in this episode implies a ‘sartorial body’ which is the inverse of the saintly corpse found in the desert. Here, a flimsy but recognizably shaped garment is synonymous with bodily corruption (and the wearer’s corruption of others), while the tattered robe, barely covering the body she has offered to God, symbolizes that body’s miraculous resistance to corruption. Insofar as the sartorial body is a social construction, Mary’s barely clad form transcends the social; it signifies the redemption of matter, yet must still be contained in the wilderness.

¹³ Judith Weiss, ‘The Metaphor of Madness in the Anglo-Norman Lives of St Mary the Egyptian,’ in Erich Poppe and Bianca Ross (eds.) *The Legend of Mary of Egypt in Medieval Insular Hagiography* (Blackrock, Co. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), pp. 161-73 (p. 166).

¹⁴ This is a near-complete inversion of Victor and Edith Turner’s view of pilgrimage as a liminal experience during which social identities and hierarchies are dissolved (*Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), pp.1-39). Once the pilgrim ship is brought into the narrative of Mary of Egypt, the designation of its participants changes to reconstitute the social lives they had ostensibly left behind. For a critique of pilgrimage as liminal experience see Kathryn Beebe, ‘Return from Pilgrimage’, in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Pilgrimage*, ed. by Larissa J. Taylor (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp.631-33.

Et si sui nee d'autre regne,
 Je n'i ai ami ne parent,
 Se m'i esta molt malement;
 O moi je n'ai argent ne or,
 Tot poés veïr mon tresor.' (ll. 271-76)

You see before you a poor woman, born in a foreign land. I have no friends or family here, which greatly saddens me. I possess no silver or gold, but my goods are plain to see.

The formulation of this plea mirrors Mary's cosmopolitan identity, derived from her clothing and association with a port city, with her appealing body as much a tradeable commodity as the other goods which pass through the city. Her vague origins serve to mystify her further, while the pilgrims are clearly denoted as Libyans. What is more, when they reach the shore they revert to being the 'pelerins d'outre la mer' (l. 359), while Mary remains 'le caitive' (l. 334). We might conclude from this that the men's sins represent a detour in the pilgrimage; their behaviour is reprehensible, but because it is presented as resulting from the malign influence of Mary they are less tainted by their sins than she is by hers: 'Tant fust cointes de sen mestier / Ke tos les fist o soi pekier.' (ll. 305-06: 'she was so good at her work that she made them all sin with her').¹⁵ Although they and, the prologue maintains, all mortals are essentially sinful, Mary alone is excluded from the church in Jerusalem, and this arresting of forward motion is crucial to the development of Mary's self-awareness.

In light of her strongly emphasized participation in the sins of others on the ship, it is striking that in her first expression of self-knowledge she reproaches herself as 'pecherris' (l. 399). Nowhere prior to this moment is she described using this precise term of sinful agency. She acknowledges her actions and recognizes the authority who is to stand in judgment over her – '...el temple ne puis entrer / Ne Dameldiu n'os apeler.' (ll. 407-8: 'I am not able to enter the temple, nor do I dare to call to God'). Her isolation in this

¹⁵ The presence of prostitutes among groups of travellers around the Mediterranean, whether pilgrims or Crusaders, is well attested throughout the medieval period. James Brundage cites a sermon by Jacques de Vitry, whose references to the mobility of the prostitutes and their literal or figurative payment with clothing is remarkably resonant with our portrait of Mary of Egypt: 'in the army camp at Damietta during the fifth Crusade, the whores slipped silently from tent to tent during the night, proffering their costly solaces to the soldiers of the Cross, feeling aggrieved if they left a client with the shirt on his back.' Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 391. Joinville, a witness to this campaign, notes Louis's expulsion of men who had been operating brothels in the camp. *Life of Saint Louis*, in *Chronicles of the Crusades*, trans. by M. R. B. Shaw (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 207.

moment is amplified by her uncharacteristic stasis, so we may read her retreat to a corner outside the church as a form of symbolic death.¹⁶ This momentary retreat to an improvised interior space is analogous to self-burying or immurement of other ascetic saints of the early church such as Macarius, who spent three years buried up to his neck to atone for his sins.¹⁷ Death further shadows this scene in Mary's shaming encounter with a statue of the Virgin, a double from whom she must break free even as she appeals to the image for help. The encounter with the Virgin is structurally important as a foreshadowing of her first encounter with Zosimas later in the poem. There are however, some pointed contrasts between these two moments of apprehension (in both its senses of fear and understanding). When Mary meets the Virgin, she knows exactly what she sees, and is painfully aware of the irony of this moment: 'Un non avons, ce est Marie, / Molt est diverse nostre vie.' (ll. 465-66: 'We have one name, that is, Mary, but our life is very different.')

So closely does the saint identify with the figure who conceives without sin (the opposite to her own sinning without conceiving) that she claims they have one life between them. The saint finds herself in the presence of her doppelganger.

Zosimas, on the other hand, will be thrown into fear and doubt when he sees Mary's shadow before he sees her person. This enacts a fleeting reversal of the usual sequence of cause and effect, as he is aware of the shadow prior to being aware of what casts it. This is a potentially terrifying incident, if we bear in mind the image of the desert as a site of demonic temptations and visions, exemplified in the feminine and blackened forms which tormented Saint Antony.¹⁸ The shadow itself is an image, an enclosed space from which light is excluded. Nevertheless, the shadow is also an effect of the light, and in what is perhaps another nod to the prologue and its reference to Augustine, shadows may be interpreted as prior images of future, everlasting glory: 'In the progress of the city of God through the ages [...] David first reigned in the earthly Jerusalem as a shadow of

¹⁶ Cary Howie's reading of this text sees the pivotal moment of Mary's retreat to a corner outside the church as an instance of a creative re-drawing of space as a response to exclusion: 'Marie's angularity serves as a kind of provisional interiority: one could almost say that she withdraws to the boundary, attempts, in her "angle," to create as interior a space as possible outside the "temple".' Howie, *Claustrophilia*, p. 46.

¹⁷ 'The ascetic's symbolic burial prefigured rebirth, for the dark, confining cell was also a womb, as is apparent from the account of Marcianus [...] who could neither lie down nor stand up in his cramped cell but had to remain curled in a fetal position.' Alison Goddard Elliott, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of the Early Saints* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1987), p. 107.

¹⁸ 'And the beleaguered devil undertook one night to assume the form of a woman and to imitate her every gesture, solely in order that he might beguile Antony.' (Athanasius, *Life of St Antony*, 5.15). In the following paragraph, we again see traces of Mary in the devil's appearance to Antony in the form of a black child, who identifies himself as 'the spirit of fornication' who has 'deceived [many] who wished to live soberly.'

that which was to come.¹⁹ Augustine's notion of the shadow as being as much a temporal as a spatial phenomenon is reminiscent of the *Vie de sainte Marie l'Egyptienne's* sequence of narrations and renarrations. Mary's shadow is a visual counterpart to the confession Zosimas is about to hear. In a portent to Zosimas' linked acts of giving Mary a robe to allow her to speak and his later repetition of her life, this 'shadow' is a form to be given contours, just as his retelling of her story might be construed as a 'reclotting' of a narrative. The silhouetted image of her outline remains unintelligible until he has dressed it, an act linking the relationship of narration to its object with the capacity for clothing to make form readable; the story can only emerge once its teller has been given a solid, legible outline. Mary had sought to control this narrative in the course of her mortal life by not fully confessing her sins, but the necessary intervention of Zosimas in the form of confessor-interlocutor binds her fate to his. Later, when she passes over the threshold between life and death, she has no choice but to relinquish control of her narrative to him.

Confession is the other element which links these two moments of revelation. In her epiphany outside the church, Mary suddenly recalls the details of the life of Jesus, and the bulk of her speech before the Virgin is a recapitulation of the articles of faith she had rejected. However, this paraphrased Credo and her comprehension of the connection between acts and their consequences still does not constitute a full performance of Christian devotion. For this enactment of the three stages of penance – contrition, confession, and fulfilment of penance – she must wait until the right confessor, to whom God reveals her, is present to hear of her sins.²⁰ The second confession, which generates the narrative Zosimas is to share with others, is marked by the vocabulary of shame, even as its content is elided.²¹ Where previously she gave voice to what she knew and believed, here she reconstitutes her self before someone who holds the formal position of being able to absolve her. In the sequence of orthodox Christian practice, this confession readies the saint for receiving the eucharist, the climax to Mary's return to the

¹⁹ *City of God*, 15. 14.

²⁰ This division of penance, initiated in Abelard's *Ethics*, is the subject of ongoing debate among theorists of practical theology in the twelfth century and beyond, with contrition regarded as the most important element of penance. See John Baldwin, 'From the Ordeal to Confession', in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages* (York: York Medieval Publications, 1998), pp. 191-209 (p. 200-01).

²¹ 'Peter the Chanter and Thomas of Chobham had argued that the first reason why confession by the mouth is necessary is because it produces shame (*erubescencia*). When anyone confesses odious wickedness to a priest, the shame that results becomes sufficient penance. In fact confession productive of shame is the greatest part of satisfaction or exterior penance.' (Baldwin, p. 205).

fold, but it also readies her for death. While it is hinted that oblivion has been her reward for successfully resisting the devil and his reminders of the ease and pleasure of her former life (ll. 685-94), the story of her life comes back to her in the presence of a man who might be viewed as being as much of a temptation to her as she could be to him. In this moment of recognition, the city is brought to the desert in the shape of a person with whom she can enter into a relationship of exchange.

The image of the saint preparing for death lends a further dimension to our reading of the legible surfaces of the poem. The improvised outfit in which Mary is laid to rest is emblematic of her relationship to the world; wrapped in rags, she retains a fleeting resemblance to orthodox Christian practice, but enfolded in her own hair, an extension of the body itself, she represents a curious ambivalence:

Dont s'est a le tere estendue
 Si conme ele estoit tote nue,
 Ses mains croisa seur se poitrine
 Et s'envolepa en se crine
 Et clost ses iex avenanment,
 Sen nés et se bouce ensement.
 [...]
 Li cors de li remest tot nu,
 Fors d'un drapel tot desrompu
 Ki en covroit une partie,
 Povrement fu ensevelie. (ll. 1295-1300, 1305-08)

Then she stretched out on the ground, and as she was naked she crossed her hands over her chest and wrapped herself in her hair, and gently closed her eyes, her nostrils and her mouth. [...] Her body was left naked, apart from a tattered robe which partially covered her – she was barely covered.

Mary's attire considered in isolation may signify the harshness of her many years in the desert, as her old clothes have been worn away and replaced with the anonymous robe given to her by Zosimas. However, what the pure and unbroken surface of Mary's sartorial body ultimately stands for is an impossible enigma. Wrapped in itself, this as yet nameless body becomes the remnant of a story which at the same time cannot be wholly comprehended and which demands to be retold.²²

²² Howie also identifies this connection between the treatment of the body and the impulse towards revelation through language: '[Mary] takes her body in hand, conforms her grasp to it, and releases it – out

2. Reading places: the city, the desert and the river

‘Vae tibi, Alexandria, quae pro Deo portenta veneraris. Vae tibi, civitas meretrix, in quam totius orbis daemonia confluxere. Quid nunc dictura es? Bestiae Christum loquuntur, et tu pro Deo portenta veneraris?’

‘Woe to thee, Alexandria,’ [Antony] cried, ‘who dost worship monsters in room of God. Woe to thee, harlot city, in whom the demons of all the earth have flowed together. What hast thou now to say? The beasts speak Christ and thou dost worship monsters in room of God.’²³

The bestial others encountered by Saint Antony on his journey into the desert in search of Paul the Hermit provoke a fearful disturbance of category distinctions. The geographical dimensions of the *Vie de sainte Marie l’Egyptienne* invite comparison of two apparently distinct types of place; the city and the desert. Yet in the context of the spiritual journey of the penitent this distinction is not entirely clear, as Antony’s lament declares. While Mary is in the cities of Alexandria and Jerusalem she comes into close physical contact with a huge number of people, but still remains distinct from the crowd, whether her narrator paints her as an object of overt desire or of secret revulsion. In the diabolic associations the poet attributes to the flighty sinner, she might even be read as introducing something of the savagery and instability of the desert into the urban environment, recalling Athanasius’s account of the apparition of the devil to Antony in the form of a woman.

Alexandria is an especially significant location within this poem, both in terms of its historical importance and its dramatic function in the narrative. It is also an important element in the manuscript tradition of the Mary legend in French. It is no surprise that

toward other bodies, including those of subsequent writers (like Rutebeuf) and editors (like Dembowski and Zink) who will touch it up and touch it again. Mary’s grasp, in other words, restores the hand to the process of scribal and editorial revision: she puts the *main*, the hand, back into the Old French word for revision, *remaniement*.’ Bill Burgwinkle and Cary Howie, *Sanctity and Pornography in Medieval Culture: On the Verge*, Manchester Medieval Literature and Culture (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 130.

²³ St Jerome, *The Life of Paul the First Hermit*, in *The Desert Fathers*, trans. by Helen Waddell (London: Constable, 1936), p. 46; *Patrologia Latina* 23, col. 24; chs. 7-8. Jane Stevenson regards Jerome’s text as an influential element in the shaping of Mary’s legend; see Stevenson, ‘The Holy Sinner: The Life of Mary of Egypt’, in *The Legend of Mary of Egypt in Medieval Insular Hagiography*, ed. by Erich Poppe and Bianca Ross (Blackrock, Co. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), pp. 19-50 (pp. 29-30).

many of the surviving versions and copies are in manuscripts containing collections of saints' lives, but it is surely more than coincidence that Mary of Egypt appears on numerous occasions either preceding or following lives of Catherine of Alexandria.²⁴ Both a strategically important port and a prominent centre for Hellenic and Christian scholarship, the city of Alexandria plays a distinct role in each of these two legends. In the Catherine legend, it is the home city and site of martyrdom of the saint; indeed, the only action to take place away from the city is the angelic transportation of Catherine's body to Mount Sinai, and the city's re-staged conversion from 'pagan' to Christian worship is emblemized in the saint herself. In Mary's legend, however, Alexandria is a place through which the saint passes, and the widespread adoration of her could indeed illustrate Jerome's expression of the 'harlot city' as a confluence of demonic impulses.

If we turn to the representation of Alexandria in other medieval works, another dimension to the legibility of the space emerges, one which illuminates the relationship between the eastern and western Mediterranean. The newly captured city is an object of desire for Crusaders, as is claimed by William of Tyre (see chapter 3), but stories are not the only goods brought west from the region. Burns's thesis that luxury textiles and jewellery from places like Alexandria have a defining role in the construction of courtly identity across a range of medieval French texts is persuasive, but takes on a more ambiguous character when applied to the consumer goods associated with Mary, who never goes west but still cuts a figure reminiscent of such courtly figures as the ladies of Arthur's court in 'Du Mantel mautaillié.' She bears all the markers of prestige, but, because of her own trade and her location in the site where various trade routes converge, the mark of luxury which attaches to these goods when brought to the courts of western Europe does not extend to her.²⁵ Her shoes from Cordoba and silk dress (whose provenance is not mentioned, but whose material typically comes from east of

²⁴ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 23112 (thirteenth century) has the *T* version of *Marie l'Egyptienne* as the final item, preceded by *Catherine*; the prose version called *O* by Dembowski (which follows the *vitae patrum* model) appears before *Catherine* in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 17229 (Artois, second half of the 13th century); Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine, 1716 (early fourteenth century); Oxford, Queen's College, 305 (eastern France, second half of the fifteenth century) and London, British Museum, add. 41179 (second half of the fifteenth century).

²⁵ Burns links Reason's suspicion of travel and the desire for wealth in the *Roman de la Rose* with Tertullian's treatise, *The Apparel of Women*: 'in condemning the artificial adornment of female bodies decorated with gold, silver, jewels, and costly clothes, [Tertullian] explains that "the only thing that gives glamour to all these articles is that they are rare and that they have to be imported from a foreign country."' (*Courtly Love Undressed*, pp. 203-4).

the Mediterranean) make her outfit a cross-cultural bricolage, reflecting Alexandria's cosmopolitan character and making her a quasi-Babylonian simulacrum of the city.

The city represents a different form of community from either the desert traversed by hermits and those who seek them or the closed-off, rigorously ordered world of Zosimas's monastery. It is figured above all as a morally indeterminate space through which the saint passes. Both cities she inhabits are sites for her to do her work ('faire sen mestier'), suggesting a link between urban life and decadence consonant with the clerical suspicions of cities described by Little (though the poem associates vice with Mary rather than the cities she passes through).²⁶ However, Mary's life in the city does not exactly correspond with commercial imperatives, as she is not interested in financial profit:

El les recevoit volentiers,
Non seulement par lor deniers,
Mais por faire le sien deduit
Les avoit o soi toute nuit. (ll. 117-20)

She welcomed them well, not just for their money, but to do as she herself
pleased she had them with her all night.

Not only is she a menace to harmonious relationships between men, she perverts the course of urban trade by valuing pleasure over cash which can be re-circulated. Though she calls herself 'meretris' (l. 400), her earning any money through her trade is incidental. As in the *Vie de saint Alexis* the circulation of money fails to conform to the norms of urban economic activity, since the saint redistributes alms to the other beggars of Edessa and Rome, allowing him to occupy the dual position of being both giver and receiver of charity. Here, wealth does not bring any benefit through its circulation, as the only objects Mary seems to acquire with her earnings are her clothes, purchased 'por mix plaisir a ses amans' (l. 196). As she invites the pilgrims to inspect her merchandise, she conflates into the 'tresor' her fine clothes and her desirable body. The emaciation of Alexis's body is accompanied by his ongoing refusal to keep the alms offered to him; while Alexis's actions in favour of his spiritual health diminish his bodily health to the point of perishing in an obscure corner of Rome, Mary's 'investment' complements the perilous allure of her physical beauty in Alexandria and Jerusalem alike. Begging and prostitution may both be occupations which depend upon urban prosperity, but while the

²⁶ Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy*, pp. 40-41.

donation of alms is rewarded with the prayers of the recipient and the favour of God, Mary's indifference to money and surplus of vice has the potential to disrupt the city's economy as surely as her promiscuity disrupts the relationships between men upon which social order is built.

My characterization of the city as a point of convergence makes it a counterpoint to the dispersive, de-centered space of the desert, which comes closer than any other site in the texts of this study to Deleuze and Guattari's *espace lisse*. Nevertheless, both Alexandria and the Palestinian desert are simultaneously strange and familiar locations. The Lenten privations of the monks, mirroring those undertaken by western and eastern Christians alike, are a ritualized response to Jesus's time in the desert. Thus the desert proves to be an infinitely re-useable location in the Christian imagination, and one whose image becomes a shorthand for the highest achievements of mortal piety from the patristic period onwards: 'The myth of the desert hung like a painting in the Christian consciousness, naturalizing Christian ideals in a world where ideals remained elusive.'²⁷ Indeed, the desert inhabited by hermits and monks is seen in texts such as Jerome's *Life of Paul the Hermit* (cited above) as being imbued with the Christian faith which he feels ought to be the preserve of the urban world; this wilderness is a space where even the beasts know God. The notion of the city, and, by extension, the 'civilized' world as an ordered system is reinforced from a distance by the information Zosimas passes on to Mary:

Et li commence a demander
 Et molt sovent a enterver
 Des rois, des contes de le tere
 Se il ont pais ou il ont guerre,
 Et des pastors qui le Loi tienent
 Confaitement il se contient.
 'Dame, Zosimas li respont,
 Dex a mis pais par tot le mont,
 N'est hom qui tant voist par le tere
 Qui ja oie parler de guerre.

²⁷ James E. Goehring, 'The Dark Side of Landscape: Ideology and Power in the Christian Myth of the Desert', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 33. 3 (2003), 437-51 (p. 439). The claiming of the desert as a framed locus for the practice of perfection is also noted by Peter Brown: 'The myth of the desert was one of the most abiding creations of late antiquity. It was, above all, a myth of liberating precision. It delimited the towering presence of "the world," from which the Christian must be set free, by emphasizing a clear ecological frontier.' Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 216.

Mais sainte Eglise a grant besong
 Que por li faichiés orison
 Que Dex li envoit pais durable
 Et le deffende del diale.' (ll. 957-70)

And she began to enquire and ask about the kings and counts of the land and whether or not they were at war, and how the clergy [lit. pastors] who upheld the faith fared. Zosimas replied, 'My lady, God brings peace to the whole world, and there is no man who, however far he travels, ever hears talk of war. But the Holy Church needs you to pray for her, so that God may send her everlasting peace and protect her from the devil.

In this response, Zosimas separates ecclesiastical and political spheres, and even though God's grace guarantees peace in the world, the church is an order worthy of special consideration and practical intervention through prayer. Though we may wonder just how this cloistered ascetic is qualified to talk about such matters, he makes it clear that harmony in public life is fragile, and that it depends upon both the intervention of God and, more obliquely, the exclusion of licentious figures like Mary.²⁸ Her eastward movement across the river and into the desert allows for her own rehabilitation and that of the world she has left behind. The exhortation to pray for the security of the church is a means for linking the saint back to Zosimas' world, even as she is preparing for her ascent to heaven, also reminding the medieval reader of the necessity of the ongoing work of devotion. The desert, a wilderness beyond the inhabited, ordered world, is in a dubious state of peace; the uncertainty as to what is 'out there' is testified in Antony's lament at the Christian beast whose faith distorts the notion of civilization versus wilderness. Furthermore, the erosion of any signs of origin in Mary's purged body – both saintly and monstrous – speaks of a universalized identity. The saint will simultaneously belong nowhere and everywhere. She had previously been a nexus towards which men and objects were drawn, but her exile from society and subsequent material degeneration marks a falling-away of this notion of her as an actual centre or the embodiment of one.

We ought not to forget here that Mary has exceeded the eastward limit of the main European pilgrim routes, which would at their furthest extent have led travellers to bathe

²⁸ This is somewhat ironic, given the correlation Brundage notes between lulls in military activity and rising levels of prostitution: 'The leaders of the [First] Crusade tried time and again to expel the whores from their camps, but they succeeded only occasionally, and only at times when their forces were in peril. As soon as a crisis ended, loose women reappeared and took up their trade with the soldiery once more.' (Brundage, p. 211).

in the river Jordan at the point where Jesus was believed to have been baptized. Unlike the river, or the other sites where pilgrims stopped en route to and around Jerusalem, which are judged to be special because of their Christian associations, the desert is special precisely because it lacks milestones and monuments. The river's western bank is the edge of the Christian world, while its eastern bank marks the beginning of the wilderness.²⁹ Pilgrimage is, I believe, a crucial metaphor for understanding the relative positions of the various figures in this poem, and there is a strong sense that the poem presents a hierarchy of pilgrimages. The laymen accompanied by Mary reach Jerusalem, and subsequently, we might infer, return home to their families and duties. The monks spend a limited amount of time in the desert-purgatory, during which time they are effectively dead to one another, but afterwards they return to their home and re-assemble their community, resuming their punitive regime of sleep deprivation and bodily mortification. The saint, meanwhile, remains (almost) alone in the desert until her death. While the command for her to go into the desert might appear to resemble a death sentence, it actually sets the terms for her release from sin and accession to heaven. The paradoxically liberating effect of rules willingly obeyed is another element of the poem echoed in *Secretary*; when Edward tells Lee that she will never cut herself again, she becomes subject to a new set of direct rules, contrasting with her mother's furtive locking away of the kitchen knives. Similarly, in a later scene conveying multiple levels of pleasure in obedience, Lee is visibly happy and relaxed as she listens to an instructional tape titled 'How to Come Out as a Dominant/Submissive.' Mary welcomes the thorns stabbing through her flesh as she wanders barefoot, imagining an equivalence between each injury and the repentance for individual sins (ll. 651-60). She is clearly no ordinary sinner, and the extreme nature of her penance means that she can be assured of direct entry to Heaven, making the savage wilderness a route to the divine.

This sense of the unreadable, unstable character of the desert is intensified in the brief period in which Mary leaves it behind. Her crossing the river underlines the significance of that unrecoverable site to the narrative, emphasizing its difference from the inhabited world. When she first encounters Zosimas, she asks him to meet her the following year at the river and bring her the eucharist. He does so, but he is distressed at seeing her on the

²⁹ On the re-orientation of the relationship between medieval Europe and its others, a move which gradually dislodges Jerusalem from its central position in world geography, see Suzanne Conklin Akbari, 'From Due East to True North: Orientalism and Orientation,' in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, The New Middle Ages (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 19-34.

far bank of the river when neither of them has any means to cross it. With the aid of God, and to Zosimas's amazement, Mary walks across the water.³⁰ This is not the first miracle he has witnessed, since she had divinely-inspired knowledge of his name, and he also saw her levitate as she prayed the previous year. It does however deserve special attention as a simultaneous crossing and resisting of boundaries. Mary is able to go from one world to another without breaking the surface of the water, a miracle which foreshadows the impermeable corpse Zosimas will later find in the desert. The divinely-assisted crossing indicates approval of her penance, but more significant than this is the location where she receives the eucharist in the sacramental gesture wherein one body absorbs another. The river is a physical and metaphorical border between the world of Christian culture and the world of savagery, a site haunted in the imagination by both the literally demonic forces described in early Christian desert writings and the monstrous, cannibalistic forms outlined in both patristic sources and in later medieval works such as the Anglo-Saxon *Marvels of the East*.³¹ Zosimas' (arguably) humanitarian mission cannot extend so far as to bring the consecrated host into this zone of punishment and reformation.³²

The place of the eucharist in this poem is central to understanding its spatial organization and the movements and destinations of the figures in the poem. It is received by Mary at the monastery of St John, her final act before entering the desert. It is next mentioned in the account of the annual preparations for Lent at Zosimas' monastery, and is finally requested by Mary. Her ecstatic reaction to receiving the host in both instances brings

³⁰ There is a thought-provoking inconsistency in the poem's representation of Zosimas's journeys into the desert. If he had previously travelled far enough from the monastery to reach Mary in the desert, he must have already crossed the river once before, but this detail is not mentioned in the account of his first journey. This omission suggests that the barrier between zones is more significant to the saint than to the monk, as she, like the inhabitants of the underworld in the Aeneas narratives, is more strictly constrained by it. On the dual significance of water for pilgrims, see Denise Péricard-Méa, 'L'eau pour le pèlerin: providence ou malediction?' in *L'eau au Moyen Age: symbols et usages. Actes du colloque Orléans, mai 1994*, ed. by Bernard Ribémont, *Medievalia* (Orléans: Paradigme, 1996), pp. 79-94.

³¹ In the conclusion to his study of monstrosity in English manuscripts, Asa Simon Mittman comments on a striking image of Noah's ark in a *Hexateuch* manuscript (London, British Library, Cotton Claudius B.iv). Decorated with the head of a dragon and the tail of a fish, it is outwardly monstrous yet protective of its human and animal contents, emphatically man-made but decorated with images of beasts, exemplifying the uncomfortable duality of monstrous identity. This duality persists in the representation of Mary but is gradually inverted as her corrupt soul and beautiful body are turned to a pure soul and withered body. Mittman, *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England*, *Studies in Medieval History and Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), pp.203-09. See also Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 41-46.

³² On the issues raised by and practices involved in the gesture of bringing the consecrated host out of church to be given to the sick, see Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, pp. 77-82.

together the beginning and ending of her penance; following the communion offered by Zosimas, she prays first to God, then to the Virgin, longing for release from life:

'Prie en ten Fil, Virge Marie,
Que me mete en se compaignie;
Se une fois estoie o toi,
N'en partiroie mais, je croi ;
Le canteroie o tes aneles
En tes cambres qui tant sont beles
Le cant nouvel o le douç son
Que canta li rois Salemon.
Ici ne puis je pas canter,
Mais tenrement m'estuet plorer.
En ceste vie qui est poie
N'ara ja mais hom vraie joie,
Car le joie de ceste vie
Est tote tornee a folie.' (ll. 1237-50)

'Pray to your Son, Virgin Mary, that he may put me in his company; once I was with you I believe I would never leave you. With your maidservants, in your beautiful chambers, I would sing the new song with the sweet sound of Solomon's song. Here I cannot sing, but must gently weep. In this mean life no man will have true joy, for the joy of this life is completely turned to folly.'

This poignant prayer holds a host of indicators of the shifts in Mary's relationship to place, or, more precisely, the lack of indicators of place; she lacks even Judas's temporary respites which coincide with holy days. She has come to see the whole world as resembling the desert she roams, devoid of comfort or satisfaction. The wholeness she craves is to be found exclusively in the heavenly host, whom she imagines as occupying multiple chambers, in contrast with both the single chamber she worked from in Alexandria and the open desert where no shelter can be found. This vision of heaven as an interior place recalls Jesus's words to his disciples in John 14. 2 ('In my Father's house are many mansions'), which also underlines the poem's theme of multiple routes to salvation. Music symbolizes harmony and order, and stands for an all-encompassing unity, but it is also an affective phenomenon which, as Bruce Holsinger argues, recurs in medieval writing on experiences of both pleasure and suffering.³³ The allusion to the Song of Solomon adds an eroticizing element to her plea, which envisages transcendence

³³ Bruce W. Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer*, Reading Medieval Culture (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

of physical human love through harmonic communion with the divine.³⁴ The prayer marks the third and final phase of her journey from folly through grief to joy; having first experienced prodigious penetrative contact with men, then total isolation from all other human life, she now longs for eternal harmony with her namesake in the female community of paradise.³⁵ Meanwhile, the representation of communion marks a moment when Mary's experience coincides with that of medieval Christians, but it also calls into question the value of pilgrimage as a unique means for experiencing the truly holy.³⁶ We see the pilgrimages both of laymen and of monks, and while they behave very differently on their respective journeys there are parallels between these two groups. Both groups set out together and, as seems likely in the case of the laymen, both groups return to their starting point. They engage in forms of worship within the context of a community, whether secular or monastic. In these respects, their journeys diverge significantly from that of the saint. Mary's only reverse move in the narrative is her return to the west bank of the Jordan, in order that she may go east again and proceed to everlasting life. The significance of this moment is underlined by Zosimas as he prepares to give her the host:

'Dame, dist il, ce samle pain,
Mais chou est li cors Jhesucrist
Que li malvais puiles ocist.
En crois fu penés et ocis ;
Ja hom n'ara sen paradis,
Se il nel rechoit en se vie.' (ll. 1194-99)

He said 'My lady, this looks like bread, but it is the body of Jesus Christ, who was killed by wicked people. He was tortured and killed on the cross; no man will reach his heaven if he does not receive it in his life.'

³⁴ Mary's fervent desire for community is reflected in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on Song of Songs, which praise the union of the Word and the soul through the allegorized marriage of Christ and the church: 'Une telle conformité unit l'âme au Verbe: semblable à Lui déjà par sa nature, elle montre qu'elle l'est aussi par la volonté, en l'aimant comme elle en est aimée.' (Sermon 83, chapter 3).

³⁵ This longing for female company following holy communion seems at odds with the tendencies identified by Caroline Walker Bynum in thirteenth-century accounts of the religious experiences of women, in which women have longings for and visions of unity with the corporeal body of Christ (*Fragmentation and Redemption*, pp. 119-50). However, the circumstances of this saint's life place Mary of Egypt in a direct relationship with the Virgin Mary, with this particular moment marking the completed cleansing of her soul in preparation for death.

³⁶ 'It may be pertinent to remember here that the later medieval centuries witnessed an ever-increasing number of new devotions centred on Christ Himself and on the Virgin. [...] Viewed logically, in fact, the underlying universalism of Christ-centred devotions implied a threat to pilgrimage, although few perhaps perceived it. If Christ Himself was fully present in every church in the sacrament of the altar, what need was there to make a long journey to see a relic which could not be half as precious?' Diana Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage, c.700-c.1500* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 64.

The allusion to preparation for death looks back to the prologue, but also forwards to the closing lines of the poem, following the monks' reflection on Zosimas' story:

Nos meïsmes nos amendon
 Qui plus grant mestier en avon,
 Et deprions ceste Marie
 Dont nos avons oï le vie
 Qu'ele deprit Nostre Seignor
 A cui il ot tant grant amor
 Que il nos pardoinst nos pechiés
 Tos les noviax et tos les viés ;
 Que lui puissions faire present
 De nos ames au Jugement. (ll. 1523-32)

We too, who need to do it [even more than the monks], make amends for our ways, and we pray to this Mary, whose life we have heard, that she should pray to Our Lord whom she loved so dearly to forgive all our sins, recent and old alike, so that we may present our souls to him on the day of Judgment.

The relationship between 'ceste Marie' and her namesake takes another, final, twist in the epilogue. Where we might expect to see a reference to the Virgin Mary as the intercessor to which the prayers of the faithful and repentant ought to be addressed, we are instead exhorted to pray to *this* Mary, present as the subject of the story and able to appeal to God on behalf of the living. The subject position of the reader relative to saintly intermediary is foreshadowed in Mary's prayer discussed above. By successfully completing her penance and participating in the practices of confession and communion she makes clear her similarity to the conscientious reader seeking forgiveness ahead of the Last Judgment. While we are urged to remember the 'present' we will offer to God at the end of time, we can reflect on how our spiritual currency comes to a halt in a manner completely different to the tokens Mary receives from her clients in Alexandria. As Mary's soul ascends to heaven, the gifts she previously received and the sins they imply fall away, and sin becomes the stuff of the precautionary tale of her life. This narrative is in turn a gift to be circulated.

3. Zosimas, the mobile narrator

In considering the role of Zosimas in the production of the saint's life, we must first address the question of how his place in the poem is affected by the poet's reorganization of the narrative elements. Zosimas makes his first appearance in the T version halfway through the poem. The prose Latin *vita*, on the other hand, opens with the monk who is described as eloquent and educated. The French poem's introduction of him is markedly more modest, doing little more to differentiate him from the other monks than giving his name:

Uns s'en va a destre partie
 Qui molt estoit de sainte vie,
 Cil iert apelés Zosimas,
 Vestus iert de molt povres dras.
 Miex ama il se povreté
 Que nus quens n'ainme se conté. (ll. 805-10)

One of them turned to the right; he lived a very holy life, was named Zosimas, and was very shabbily dressed. He loved his poverty better than any count loves his land.

Unlike the *vita*, in which Zosimas conforms closely to the desert lives' typical figure of notable piety whose journey into the desert is motivated by the desire to find a man whose deeds surpass his own ('vir qui prior me in actibus sit'), the Zosimas of the French text does not appear to be particularly distinguished; the above is all we learn about him at this stage in the poem, with his delight in his extreme poverty the complete opposite to Mary's joy in her finery in the early part of the poem.³⁷ Instead of giving a lengthy description of this individual monk, T features a substantial description of the rituals and habits of the monastery's inhabitants.³⁸ This is not mere window-dressing, but an

³⁷ In Elliott's structuralist analysis of the lives of the desert saints she identifies this as one of the typical motivations for a would-be hermit's departure from his home (the 'more' motif). It is worth noting, however, that in this particular case this motivation applies to the confessor rather than to the saint whose life is the subject of the narrative. Elliott, p. 83.

³⁸ In his poem, which otherwise follows the structure of T, Rutebeuf unsurprisingly imbues his principal monk with a vanity closer to that of the *vita*:

'Je ne sai avant ne arriere
 Qui de m'ordre me puist reprendre
 Ne qui noient m'en puist aprendre;
 Philosophe n'autre homme sage,
 Tant aient apris moniage,

important element of the poem's concern with questions of identity, ritual and the formation of institutions.³⁹ Our poem's account of the monastery describes the gruelling asceticism of the monks, who wear hair shirts all year round, and are so preoccupied with prayer that they never go to bed. The annual climax of their privations is their expulsion from the monastery for the duration of Lent, which they spend wandering the desert and purposely avoiding contact with one another:

Quant les avoit aconmeniés,
 Par ordre lor lavoit lor piés,
 Puis aloient a orison
 Et il lor faisoit le sermon,
 Conmandoit les entrebaisier,
 Puis lor ouvroit l'uis del mostier,
 En le forest les envoioit,
 A Damedieu les conmandoit.
 Li saint moine se departoient,
 Fors sol deus qui luec remanoient,
 Nient por le paor des larrons
 Qu'il cremissent de lor maisons,
 Mais por faire le Dieu mestier,
 Remanoient cil el mostier ;
 Car n'est pas bien de sainte glise
 Que li mestier Dieu en defise. (ll. 737-52)

When [the abbot] had given them communion, he washed their feet, then they went to prayer and he delivered a sermon; he commanded them to embrace one another, then opened the door of the church and sent them out into the forest, commending them to God. The holy monks set out, apart from two who remained there, but not because they feared their houses may be robbed; in order to do the work of God they stayed in the church, for it is wrong if the work of God is not undertaken in holy church.

This description's emphasis on the communal nature of the monks' preparations for their annual departure marks out their non-differentiation in the eyes of their abbot. Later in the poem the abbot is described by the narrator as 'paistre' (l. 791), while Mary refers to the monks as 'oeilles' (l. 1049); these terms recall the parable of the Good Shepherd, with

N'a il es desers qui me vaille:
 Je sui li grains, il sont la paille.' (ll. 564-70)

³⁹ The community here depicted may be compared with the Céli Dé groups described by Rumsey, who sees that particularly rigorous strain of Irish monasticism as engaging in constant prayer and observation of the monastic hours in an attempt to redeem time, believed to be inherently sinful since it is of the world. (Rumsey, pp. 69-103). Mary's reproachful message to the abbot is, I believe, part of the text's larger project of promoting a moderate alternative to both the hedonistic abandon of urban life and the punishing regime of the monastery.

the abbey standing for the Christian community and the ‘pastor’ in the role of God. However, the sheep who strays from the flock is not one of his men, but Mary, and she can only return permanently to the known world in narrative form. This allusion to the moralizing Biblical narrative foreshadows the coming of another instructive story from beyond the fold.

Another noteworthy detail of the picture the text presents of narrative practices is the monks’ uniform withholding of their experiences in the desert:

Mais cascuns d’iax s’est bien teü
De chou que il avoit veü ;
Nul n’en i avoit novelier
Qui se volsist gloirefier. (ll. 1103-6)

But each of them kept quiet about what he had seen; none of them was so boastful that he wanted to glorify himself.

The placement of this passage at the point when Zosimas and the other monks have returned to the monastery differs in both location and content from the prose texts in the *Vitae patrum* tradition. For example, in the prose version O, the non-confession of experience is included in the passage describing the Lent ritual prior to Zosimas’ departure rather than at the end of the annual wandering.⁴⁰ It is figured as a command rather than as a choice, and the reasons for this taciturnity are made more explicit:

Tiex fu li ordres de cel moustier que chascuns demoustrast a Deu seulement le cors de son estrif et ne desirrast pas estre glorefiez d’ome puor querre vainne gloire ne loange humaine. (15. 1-4)

It was the rule of this monastery that each should show to God alone his body at the limit of endurance, and should not seek vainglory or the praise of men.

If the desert becomes place at the moment when their mortified bodies become visible, it is also the place where they must, in a manner of speaking, bury their stories. This sets up a potentially problematic relationship between the members of the community and the authority to which they are answerable; in Benedict’s rules on behaviour during Lent, he emphasizes the free will of the individual to decide what he will give up, but also insists upon the monk’s consultation of the abbot:

⁴⁰ 14. 3-6; 15. 1-7. Dembowski’s edition is based upon Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 17229.

Hoc ipsud tamen quod unusquisque offert, abbati suo suggerat, et cum ejus fiat oratione et voluntate; quia quod sine permissione patris spiritalis fit, praesumptioni deputabitur et vanae gloriae, non mercedi. (*Rule of St Benedict*, chapter 49)

Let each one, however, tell his abbot what he is offering, and let it be done with his consent and blessing; because what is done without the permission of the spiritual father shall be ascribed to presumption and vainglory and not reckoned meritorious.⁴¹

This links into the distinctive representations of Zosimas in the two traditions; in the texts which follow the Latin text closely, such as O, the monk is culpable of pride in his piety, so much so that he claims that he is superior to his brother monks and that there is nothing they can teach him. The suffering bodies of these monks become visible in the desert where no-one but God can see them. They become corporeal manifestations of humility and preparedness for penance. His journey into the desert is prompted by the intervention of a holy father who tells him ‘...nus home n’a perfection, quar autres voies sont de salu’ (4. 4-5 – ‘no man is perfect, there are other routes to salvation’). T, on the other hand, does not portray Zosimas as proud, nor does it dwell upon the notion of public confession as unseemly for those who seek the esteem of God more than the esteem of their companions. Its evocation of a Christian ethics of storytelling combining confession with revelation gives greater weight to Mary’s personal injunction, which precedes the poet’s comment that the monks keep themselves to themselves, and which relocates the hidden/revealed dichotomy away from the wandering monks and onto those already in the desert:

‘...ne te caut dire me vie
Entre que je soie fenie.
Se Dex m’a a toi demoustree,
Par toi volrai estre celee.’ (ll. 1043–46)

‘You should not tell of my life until I am dead. If God has revealed me to you, I want to be concealed by you.’

The concealing in this case takes the form of silence, whereas the anticipated ‘vie’ is a form of revelation. But we could also see the story which eventually emerges as a form of

⁴¹ Saint Benedict, *The Rule of Saint Benedict in Latin and English*, trans. and ed. by Justin McCann (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1952).

concealment. The ambiguous status of the narrative is closely connected with the ambiguous status of Zosimas himself. He has the power to grant her communion, while she has the power to compel him to remain silent. Zosimas is hailed as a special case not by the abbot who sends him out, but by the saint. The reordering of elements in this poem poses important questions about the notion of ownership of Mary's story. A straightforward reading of this life might conclude that since Zosimas does not appear until relatively late on, his importance is diminished. Whereas other versions structure his encounter with Mary as a prompt to his self-analysis and the deepening of his faith, our poem appears to reverse this by making Zosimas the final necessary element in Mary's redemption by hearing her confession and bringing her the eucharist, meaning that he is still important, but less so than in the other version. However, this conclusion undervalues the consequences for the narration wrought by the shift towards a more conventional hagiographical structure; that is, the newly significant role of the author, who brings us finally to ask for the intercession of 'ceste Marie / Dont nos avons oï la vie' (ll. 1525-26: 'This Mary, whose life we have heard'). Mary's life story is told twice in the *Vita*, by Mary and then by Zosimas. In our poem, it is told three times, first by the narrator, then the saint, then the confessor, with each of these retellings abstracting the story from its subject.⁴² Mary's account given to Zosimas is not fully reported, or even paraphrased, but is only glossed over in the most minimal of terms, although in the six preceding lines of direct speech she uses 'celee/celeraï' three times to express how full and frank her confession will be:

Or commence a conter Marie,
 Rien ne laissa, que tot ne die.
 Mais dementres qu'ele conta,
 Poés savoir que grant honte a.
 Quant li ot contee sa vie,
 As pies li chiet, merchi li crie. (ll. 1019-24)

Now Mary begins to speak, leaving nothing unsaid. But as she spoke, you may know that she was deeply ashamed. When she had told him her life, she fell at his feet, begging him for mercy.

⁴² 'The dangerously seductive female body with which Mary begins the poem is gradually elided not only by its mortification in the desert, but also by the various appropriations of that body through the narration of her life, appropriations that eventually replace the female sexual body with a feminine signifier.' (Campbell, *Medieval Saints' Lives*, p. 160)

The confessional narrative act is inextricably linked with shame for Mary, and the poet's claim that nothing is left out of her account equates transparency with humility. This is a model example of the demonstration of contrition necessary to penance, as formulated by Abelard: 'Penitentia autem proprie dicitur dolor animi super eo in quo deliquit cum aliquem scilicet piget in aliquot excessisse' (Now, repentance is properly called the sorrow of the mind over what it has done wrong, when, namely, someone is ashamed in having gone too far in something).⁴³ The contours of her personal history are dissolved in this image of the shamed woman begging for mercy. It appears almost as if the past events of her life have become separated from her present state – all we have here are their consequences. Recalling her moment of epiphany before the image of the Virgin in Jerusalem, her earlier utterances make clear the distinction between her and her namesake as well as her recollection of the Christian narrative she rejected in her adolescent embrace of 'legerie'. Here she asks an ordained monk for clothing before verbally 'laying herself bare' before him. The foregrounding of orthodox practice in the earlier description of life in the monastery, with specific attention paid to the commemoration of Lent, emerges again in the pivotal moment of Mary's full confession. It will re-emerge at the end of the poem when Zosimas brings her story back to his community, allowing him to place his own frame around this narrative as he repeats it for a new audience:

Quant tot furent en lor ostel,
 En lor capitre comunel,
 Zosimas commence a parler,
 Il ne se volra mais celer.
 De l'Egyptiene Marie
 Lor raconte toute le vie,
 Com il le trova el desert,
 El liu delitaule ou ele ert,
 Et com ele vint a l'altr'an
 Encontre lui al flun Jordan,
 Com ele ala a pié sor l'onde
 De l'eve qui tant est parfonde,
 Et com il la trova fenie
 A l'autre an et desenfoïe,
 Et del non qu'il trova escrit,
 Et de l'oseque que il fist.
 Puis lor a conté del lion
 Comment il ot a compaignon. (ll. 1499-1516)

⁴³ *Ethics*, 18. 22-23; *Peter Abelard's Ethics*, ed. by D. E. Luscombe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 76.

When they were all gathered in their chapterhouse, Zosimas began to speak; he didn't want to hide himself any longer. He told them all about the life of Mary the Egyptian, how he found her in the desert, in the lovely place where she was, and how she came to meet him the next year on the opposite bank of the river Jordan, how she walked across the surface of the deep waters, and how he found her dead and unburied a year later, and of the name which he found written, and the funeral he gave. Then he told them of the lion, and how it was his companion.

Again we see the vocabulary of concealment and revelation, but here what has been hidden is not the narrative or the saint. It is Zosimas himself – 'Il ne se volra mais celer'. When viewed in light of the preceding poem, this suggests an internalization of what he has heard; his selfhood is equated with the story he is about to tell. This sense of identity is also conveyed in the report of his experience, which fits all the details of Mary herself into 'le vie' while giving a step-by-step account of his own experience as witness. It is intensified as the poet moves on to detail Zosimas' active engagement in the story – though he is initially a witness, he comes to participate in the narrative, and his internalization of the message of universal forgiveness for the truly repentant feeds into the reaction of the monks to his words. On hearing this account the monks are moved to tears and vow to 'do better'.

In contrast with the *Vita*, where Zosimas proudly declares that there is nothing any of his fellow monks can teach him, this poem sees him move from being a fairly ordinary brother into the powerful and privileged role of teacher. The fact that this act of narration takes place in the chapterhouse is significant; the monks had previously only been shown in prayer in the chapel, but here the internal topography of the monastery has been expanded to include a space for its inhabitants to address one another as well as God. By bringing a new story into the space for the reading of the rules and showing the affective reactions of the abbot and the other monks, Zosimas brings a dynamism to their liturgy, breaking the monotony of the regime described earlier. In speaking of his experience, Zosimas steps apart from his brothers to turn speech itself back inwards to the community, and the form it takes is the life of the saint. He also becomes the mediator between the saint and the poet, further identifying him within a didactic chain of transmission. Mary, who had herself been permanently excluded from society, is thus able to return, but in a form voiced and framed by an interlocutor who takes care to insert the account of his own devotional practice into the narrative. Having previously

given Mary the robe which allowed her to speak and him to behold her, Zosimas is now tasked with clothing his experience verbally in order to preserve her memory.

Conclusion

The *Vie de sainte Marie l'Egyptienne* is deeply concerned with the relationship between speech and beauty, both of which are currency capable of being turned to good or bad ends. Zosimas turns speech to the instruction and entertainment of his brothers, deviating from the strict code of his community whose speech is turned entirely to institutionally-sanctioned ritual and address of God, while Mary's beauty, which could have gained her a wealthy husband and a respectable way of life, is turned to self-gratification. Having been lost due to her physical ordeal, her beauty is finally restored, but is reflected onto her surroundings, the 'liu delitaule ou ele ert' (l. 1506), while her closed-off, impermeable body signifies the beauty of integrity. In a most unexpected way, the corpse of the bedraggled hermit beautifies a place more usually associated with bestial savagery. The saint can only become translateable, however, with the intervention of God, who writes her name and the instructions on how to bury her on the very ground she – and the wandering monks – have walked over. The only inscribed surface is, finally, the floor of the desert itself, drawing our attention to this as one last boundary which Mary must transcend. The intense labour involved in burying the saint underlines her complex relationship with surfaces; she is not able to go 'beneath the surface' herself. Just as it takes someone else to place her body below the ground, it takes someone else to make her life and penance into a morally instructive narrative. As she wraps her hair around her body, she constitutes both the surface and what lies beneath it, an apt metaphor for the model of textual transmission in this poem. Even though she ultimately relinquishes control of her own story, Mary is a participant in narrative through her recollection of the life of Jesus and her confession of her own sins. Narrative is a necessary element to her forgiveness and her orientation of herself in the Christian world, even though she cannot be part of it. By going into the desert she can transfer the narrative of her sins onto her mortal flesh, even as her soul approaches perfection. The burned, weathered body is left in the abandoned zone, while soul and 'life' depart in different directions. Michael Uebel claims that the desert is a site of

multiple potentialities which resists final definition and which 'is never a resting place.'⁴⁴ While this is not literally true for Mary, whose body remains there, the eschatological dimension of the poem figuratively pulls the saint apart, with her soul ascending to heaven while the exemplar of her life is brought back to the monastery for incorporation into the narrative culture of Christianity. By exiting the desert in two directions simultaneously she is transformed; paradoxically, she is both complete and available for refashioning.

⁴⁴ Uebel, 'Medieval Desert Utopia', p. 36.

Chapter 7

Gardens and Islands: the redefinition of space in the *Roman de Brut*

Rogatu itaque illius ductus, tametsi infra alienos ortulos falerata uerba non collegerim, agresti tamen stilo propriisque calamis contentus codicem illum in Latinum sermonem transferre curauit; nam si ampullosis dictionibus paginam illinissem, taedium legentibus ingererem, dum magis in exponendis uerbis quam in historia intelligenda ibi commorari oporteret.

Though I have never gathered showy words from the gardens of others, I was persuaded by his [Walter, archdeacon of Oxford's] request to translate the book into Latin in a rustic style, reliant on my own reed pipe; had I larded my pages with bombastic terms, I would tire my readers with the need to linger over understanding my words rather than following my narrative.¹

The references to reed pipes and opposition to 'showy words' (or, in Lewis Thorpe's translation, 'gaudy flowers of speech') in Geoffrey of Monmouth's prologue to his *History of the Kings of Britain* introduces a certain pastoral imagery which, while not explicitly carried over by Wace in his *Roman de Brut*, nevertheless inform the impression the cleric from Jersey creates of this island kingdom.² I believe that these two distinct kinds of place – the island and the garden – offer rhetorical clothing for imagining the historical drama of the reassembly of the Trojan diaspora and the Briton people's battles to maintain and extend their territories.³ The tension between garden and island 'springs forth' again in Geoffrey's account of the prophecies of Merlin; the garden, standing for the British nation, is both an enclosure and a site of regenerating beauty, but it is also the site of turmoil and destruction.⁴ The gardens of style to which he refers, images hinting

¹ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. by Neil Wright, ed. by Michael D. Reeve, Arthurian Studies Series (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007), prologue, 12-17.

² All references in French and their English translations (unless otherwise indicated) are taken from Wace's *Roman de Brut: A History of the British*, revised edition, trans. and ed. by Judith Weiss, Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002). See also Thorpe's translation of the *History of the Kings of Britain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966).

³ With regard to the mnemonic use of the image of the cloister-garden as a principle for the organization of encyclopedic knowledge, citing as an example Richard de Fournival's *Bibliomoria*, see Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images*, 400-1200, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴ In Merlin's prophecy, the White Dragon represents the Saxons and the Red Dragon the British: 'The white dragon will rise again and summon Germany's daughter. Our gardens will be filled again with foreign seed and the red dragon will languish at the pool's edge.' (5. 63-65: 'Exurget iterum albus draco et filiam Germaniae inuitabit. Replebuntur iterum ortuli nostri alieno semine, et in extremitate stagni languebit rubeus.'

at the disavowed multiple sources for his text, are opposed to his own unified and uncorrupted reproduction of a narrative enclosure; his own rhetorical *locus amoenus*, more pastoral than cultivated yet still constrained by an implied equivalence between a single source and a single people, is, he claims, free from foreign influence.⁵ Nevertheless, his purportedly naïve rhetorical space, in which static ornamentation is subordinate to compelling narrative drawn from a single source ('a very old book in the British tongue, which set out in excellent style a continuous narrative of all their deeds from the first king of the Britons, Brutus, down to Cadualadrus, son of Caduallo'), is a monument constructed through plunder and invention.⁶ This observation can be extended to other works which claim to tell the same story, for as Michelle Warren's study of border histories observes, 'like the island itself, the story of the past becomes a cultural space to be conquered.'⁷

Warren's claim that, for Wace (but not Geoffrey), 'land does not signify an immutable cultural identity', reflects her argument that Wace's distance from his subject matter means that he is dispassionate in his assessments of legitimate rule.⁸ A Jerseyman schooled in Normandy, he writes for the benefit of the latest conquerors of the land he refers interchangeably to as England and Britain. I would contend, however, that Wace's own distinctive 'insularity' may indicate a more subtle conception of what islands are and of what they represent for the writer of history (or pseudo-historical propaganda). We might imagine that any narrative which begins as the quest for an island ought to view that island as a metaphor for self-containment and unity, but this land at the edge of the world is to be the focus for more than a thousand years of alternating peace and internal strife, invasions and continental expansions. All the while it remains bound to the same coastline and topography it had when the exiled Italo-Trojan prince Brutus first set eyes on it. Yet such an image of integrity or consistency through time, seductive as it seems, cannot accurately encompass the historical currents Wace chronicles in his poem. Warren's assessment of boundary writing more generally claims that 'topographic limits sustain paradox,' but her claim that the *Roman de Brut* sees territory as simply belonging to whoever can defend it deserves qualification; in my view, Wace's work is more imbued

⁵ On the representation of gardens in medieval writing, see Zumthor, *La mesure du monde*, pp. 106-10.

⁶ Prologue, 9-11: 'Britannici sermonis librum uetustissimum qui a Bruto primo rege Britonum usque ad Cadualadrum filium Caduallonis actus omnium continue.'

⁷ Michelle R. Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain 1100-1300*, Medieval Cultures (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 13.

⁸ Warren, p. 156.

with these concerns than she suggests.⁹ The island where Brutus establishes his 'new Troy' is the subject and symbol of a narrative which claims to be orderly but which perpetually seems to be tripping over its past, crumpling and expanding as its inhabitants come into contact with others; at various points the Britons engage in pillage beyond their own shores, but they also suffer under invading forces. The struggle for pre-eminence between Britain and Rome is the larger context in which later vernacular retellings of the Arthur story locate the rise and fall of the Britons' most celebrated king. The *Roman de Brut* is an orientation point for works from other genres, and it has itself been subject to numerous textual invasions, enriching and complicating any appreciation of its reception.¹⁰

The dynamism and permeability of Wace's poem can perhaps be most immediately demonstrated by the diverse contents of the thirty-three manuscripts in which the poem survives in full or in fragments.¹¹ The distinct Anglo-Norman and Continental manuscript traditions indicate the varied ways in which the text may have been read. Evidence from the Anglo-Norman manuscripts (of which nine contain complete or near-complete versions) points towards an incorporation of the *Roman de Brut* into a tradition of narrative chronicle. For example, Lincoln Cathedral Library 104 (Anglo-Norman, thirteenth century) opens with the *Roman de Brut*, and also contains Gaimar's *L'Estoire des Engleis* and Jordan Fantosme's *Chronicle*, but it also interpolates the prophecies of Merlin, as does Durham Cathedral Library C iv 27(I) (Anglo-Norman, end of the twelfth century). The more mythical dimensions of the poem are brought out by the context of the Continental manuscripts, as the four instances of the *Roman de Brut* following on from the *Roman d'Eneas* are all of Continental origin. Elements of romance are more prevalent in the Continental manuscripts, which include the much-studied 'Guiot' copy, incorporating the Arthurian romances of Chrétien de Troyes. These complex traditions

⁹ Warren, pp. 4-5, 170.

¹⁰ In this respect the *Roman de Brut*'s generic instability aligns it with the syncretic qualities Susan Crane identifies in insular romance: 'Insular romances often draw on epic, hagiography, and courtly romance, yet they take pains to distance themselves from these strong influences. [...] The insular poets' sensitivity to the strength of other literatures thus leads them not to exclude so much as to suggest and then engulf their generic opposition, consolidating their allegiance to a particular version of romance.' Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 222.

¹¹ Jean Blacker, 'Will the Real Brut Please Stand Up? Wace's *Roman de Brut* in Anglo-Norman and Continental Manuscripts', *Text*, 9 (1996), 175-86 (p. 176). Of the complete or near-complete versions, nine are of Anglo-Norman origin, while ten are Continental. The fragments come from seven Insular and six Continental manuscripts.

mean significant difficulty for modern editors of the text; as Jean Blacker observes on Ivor Arnold's 1938-40 edition, 'In his effort to represent Wace's original, Arnold has presented a text which represents neither tradition from either side of the Channel, and it is these traditions which are ultimately our links to Wace's poem.'¹² To address these traditions and contexts comprehensively would take up several theses, but this brief outline is an apt starting point for my reading of the *Roman de Brut*'s complicated and conflicted representation of place and narrative.¹³ These inflected interpretive possibilities of the *Roman de Brut* also illustrate the connections between this poem and the works I have examined in the previous six chapters. By disturbing the chronological connection between Wace's text and the *Roman d'Eneas* – a sequence observed in four of the manuscripts, as indicated in chapter 1 – I hope to have demonstrated a range of authorial reflections on the difficulties of talking about place, whether that be the place of the diegesis, the author, or the manuscript. Similarly, I have broken with the multi-stranded continuous chronology of the *Roman de Brut* to present three separate elements from the fringes of the text – giants, women, and the supernatural – as reference points illustrating the text's concerns with orthodoxy and permanence.¹⁴ Warren argues that the *Roman de Brut* is the narrative actualization of colonial strategy and self-regard, as 'the symmetry between historical conquerors and the historiography of conquest effaces the difference between deeds and their textualization.'¹⁵ In many respects this is true, but Wace's innovative treatment of his material alters the impression we gain of his narrative of kingship and domination. Further to this, I will demonstrate how the representation of place and boundaries in the *Roman de Brut* can be both illuminated and complicated through reference to generic conventions which do not immediately seem to

¹² Blacker, p. 179.

¹³ On the manuscript tradition of the *Roman de Brut*, see Jean Blacker, 'Will the Real Brut Please Stand Up? Wace's *Roman de Brut* in Anglo-Norman and Continental Manuscripts', *Text*, 9 (1996), 175-86; Lori Walters, 'Le Rôle du scribe dans l'organisation des manuscrits de Chrétien de Troyes', *Romania*, 106 (1985), 303-25. On specific manuscripts, see Richard Trachsler, 'Le recueil Paris, BN fr. 12603', *Cultura Neolatina*, 34 (1994), 189-211; Busby on Paris BN fr. 794 (*Codex and Context*, I, 106-08), and on Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 50 (II, 760-61).

¹⁴ On synthesizing linearity as a feature of more expansive historical record at the dawn of the print era ('Just as a slide rule renders linear logarithmic relations, so time lines in these universal histories helped to make linear their spiralling genealogies'), see Kathleen Biddick, 'Becoming Collection: The Spatial Afterlife of Medieval Universal Histories,' in *Medieval Practices of Space*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and Michal Kobialka, Medieval Cultures Series (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 223-41 (p. 224).

¹⁵ Warren, p. 138. A similarly hygienic view of succession and overthrow in Wace's poem is hinted at in Françoise Le Saux's comments on the built environment in chronicles of Britain ('Un monde sans fenêtres? De l'*Historia Regum Britanniae* au *Brut* de Layamon', in *Par la fenestre: Études de littérature et de civilisation médiévales*, ed. by Chantal Connochie-Bourgne, Sénéfiance (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2003), pp. 295-305).

apply. The poem as island-garden is a fitting image for a text which sees fantasies of territorial integrity haunted by pervasive reminders of what had been thought to have been excised.

1. Heroes and giants: Brutus, Arthur, and territorial domination

Unlike the texts studied in the previous chapter there is no obvious single protagonist in the *Roman de Brut*, but the most plausible candidates for 'hero' status must be Brutus, founder of the British realm, and Arthur, its most spectacular leader. Yet in many respects these two figures are quite dissimilar. While the former fulfils a prophecy by causing the deaths of his parents and going into exile, the latter inherits the royal office of his father and is able to use his newly consolidated kingdom as the starting point for building an empire. Brutus kills his own father, and inherits nothing. To fully illustrate the changing ideas of 'patrie' within this text we ought to recall briefly the figure of Eneas. If we briefly reassert the continuum between that text and this established in the *Eneas* manuscripts including Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 1450, which inserts the romances of Chrétien de Troyes into the episode describing the Round Table, we might reasonably assert that Eneas rather than Brutus is the true forerunner to Arthur; both of them regain an ancestral homeland, and both are empire-builders who draw others towards them and turn them outwards to assist in the defence of their possessions. Moreover, both are (like Merlin) conceived by supernatural means. Despite his success in establishing a new kingdom, Brutus cuts a much lonelier figure, and though he is successful in his negotiations with the Greek king, his engagement in piracy and pillage to fund this kingdom betrays the violent underpinning to his nationalist ambitions even before he has found a land to claim as his own. He wins nobody to his cause but other dispossessed Trojans, and receives his prophecy from an ambivalent goddess in an abandoned city. The distinction between Brutus's and Arthur's relationships with the people they encounter lies in the implied shame of Brutus's fellow Trojans, scattered and frequently enslaved; the reassembly of the Trojan diaspora may be a necessary condition of the founding of 'Trinovant', but it is haunted by the memory of why it was dispersed in the first place.

With a case such as Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 1450, in which discrete narratives are inserted into a larger narrative-historical frame which is itself made up of chronologically ordered narratives, the multiple points from which 'the knight sets out' invite comparative reflection upon its protagonists' origins. Brutus's journey towards the island which will bear his name is initiated by his being sent into permanent exile, forever isolating him from the land of his birth. Prior to the expulsion of Brutus, however, there is already a hint at the difficulty of inter-generational continuity in Ascanius's failure to relocate the Trojan gods brought to Italy by Aeneas:

Une cité edifia
 Ke l'on Albelunges numa,
 E a sa marastre laissa
 La terre, e quite li clama
 Le chastel ke Eneas fist
 Qu'el l'eüst tant cum el vesquist.
 Mais lé Deus de Troie en ad pris
 Ke Eneas i aveit mis,
 En Albe les vuleit aveir,
 Mais il n'i porent remaneir;
 Unches nes i sout tant porter
 K'al main les i poüst trover;
 El temple ralouent ariere,
 Mais jo ne sai en quel maniere. (ll. 91-104)

He built a city, called Alba, left the land to his stepmother and granted her the possession of Aeneas' castle as long as she lived. But he took from it the gods of Troy, which Aeneas had placed there, and wanted to have them in Alba. However, they would not stay there: he could never carry them away to such an extent that he would find them there in the morning. They would return to the temple, but how, I do not know.

This episode, not mentioned by Geoffrey, is an early indication of the problems inherent to the relocation of peoples from one place to another.¹⁶ The gods who had foretold and validated the surviving Trojans' re-establishment in Italy appear also to dictate that they should move no further, and the line of descendants Aeneas saw in the underworld has determined an inviolable demographic distribution.¹⁷ We might compare these

¹⁶ On the political dimension to the transfer of relics from Rome to northern Europe, which I would argue bears comparison with the episode described here as the *Roman de Brut* hints forward to the division between the lines which would found Rome and Britain, see Smith, 'Old saints, new cults', pp. 317-35.

¹⁷ The form dictated by foreknowledge can be compared with the notion of divinely created form (as opposed to malleable body) which, as Sarah Kay argues, underpins the *Ovide moralisé*: 'there is an archetype, an Idea that exists in God's mind, in his *sapience devine*, and that is imprinted on mankind before the fall. But this archetype is inaccessible, given that it is lost to us in our present state and can be

unspecified gods with Diana, at whose shrine Brutus will receive the prophecy regarding his fate. However, the temple of Diana is located in a ruined city on the abandoned island of Leogice, a landscape that speaks enigmatically of failed settlement. Physically and symbolically, this is far removed from the newly occupied Trojan territory in Italy. Furthermore, Diana herself is described in some detail, and is represented as both prophet and deceiver:

Guaste unt trovee une cite
 E un temple d'antiquité.
 L'imagē ert d'une deuesse,
 Diane, une divineresse:
 Diabls esteit, ki la gent
 Deceveit par enchantement;
 Semblance de feme perneit
 Par quei le pople deceveit.
 Diane se fesait numer
 E deuesse del bois clamer.
 Kant cele terre esteit poplee,
 Ert l'image bien coltivee
 E tenue ert en grant enur;
 La veneient li anceisur
 Pur demander e pur oïr
 Del tens ki esteit a venir.
 Diane lur donout respuns
 Par signes e par visiuns. (ll. 633-50)

They found a deserted city and an ancient temple. The idol was that of a goddess, Diana, a prophetess. She was a devil who deceived the people through sorcery, taking the appearance of a woman by which to delude them. She called herself Diana, claiming to be goddess of the forest. When the land was inhabited, the idol was worshipped and greatly revered; the men of those days came there to ask and hear about the time to come. Diana replied to them through signs and visions.

In each of these episodes, the topographic specificity of these gods in their physical forms seems to function as a point of resistance against the movements of mortals from one place to another. Diana's persistence however, in spite of the flight of those who worshipped her, may be matched with Brutus's own circumstances. It is fitting that a man who kills his father accidentally while hunting in the forest should hear prophecy from the goddess of hunting, while her connection with the forest (as opposed, perhaps,

regained only through redemption. In the *Ovide moralisé* monologism is a striving after this unique form, which is at the same time the promise of community.' Kay, *The Place of Thought*, pp. 68-69.

to the gardens of Geoffrey's prologue and Merlin's allegorical vision) links to Brutus's status as a pioneer, with the allusion to how her 'image' was 'cultivée' (a term which again calls to mind the ambiguous space of the garden) as a further complication to the relationship between people and territory.¹⁸ His awareness of how figures of the divine must be treated, meanwhile, locates him as a participant in a culture which does not depend upon specific objects but which implies a religious identity extending beyond authorized and familiar places. His father's vain attempts to remove the Trojan gods from the temple built for them by Aeneas means that the divinities of Brutus's ancestors are now firmly rooted in Italy, but Brutus has derived from them the conventional forms of worship necessary for making contact with the transcendent. Treacherous and demonic though she is, Diana lends a certain consistency to the religious culture of the Mediterranean, while Brutus proves himself an apt navigator of that cultural and physical location.¹⁹

Brutus first emerges as a leader figure in the episode in Greece, where the lone exile recovers his distant kin and becomes their leader. This may be a more positive means for identification and community formation than the fraught relationship which is to evolve between the British and the Romans, though as I have argued above there is undisclosed shame in the recollection of how the Trojans were scattered across the Mediterranean. If Brutus's reunion of a section of the Trojan people as a fighting force is to be compared with Arthur's dominion over the whole of Britain and subsequent expansion onto the

¹⁸ Warren regards this episode as a demonstration of how Wace regards the productive use of land as integral to its possession by any given group; Wace sees land left to waste as the epitome of failed settlement (pp. 143-44). On the significance of agricultural production to medieval narrative histories claiming Trojan descent for European peoples, see Richard Waswo, 'Our Ancestors, the Trojans: Inventing Cultural Identity in the Middle Ages', *Exemplaria* 7. 2 (1995), 269-290, especially pp. 279-282.

¹⁹ The notion of the Mediterranean as a unifying research theme potentially bringing together collaborative work on literature from diverse regions, including work in less widely studied languages, has recently been proposed by Sharon Kinoshita ('Medieval Mediterranean Literature', *PMLA*, 124. 2 (2009), 600-08). Such an approach would build upon the seminal work by Fernand Braudel, whose studies of the Mediterranean region see it as a perpetually-traversed space but also as one whose limits extend beyond its geographical edges: 'To meet the historian's demands [...] the Mediterranean must be accepted as a wide zone, extending well beyond the shores of the sea in all directions. We might compare it to an electric or magnetic field, or more simply to a radiant centre whose light grows less as one moves away from it, without one's being able to define the exact boundary between light and shade. [...] The Mediterranean (and the accompanying Greater Mediterranean) is as man has made it. The wheel of human fortune has determined the destiny of the sea, expanding or contracting its area.' Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. by Siân Reynolds, 2 vols (London: Collins, 1972), I, 169-70. While more recent historians have regarded this model of the Mediterranean as a coherent network as being largely deficient outwith the period of Roman domination, it remains a productive notion for students of the cultures around its shores; this may be due to the capacity for literature and art to explore the recuperation or creation of an alluring 'other'. The frailty or failure of trade and transport links might, for example, serve to increase the desirability of things and people from elsewhere.

continent, however, we must evaluate the relative significances of the spaces of the Mediterranean and Britain. From the condensed account of how Aeneas came to Italy onwards, the Mediterranean is bordered by multiply-occupied sites, with untold numbers of conflicts resulting from competing claims of ownership; the kingdom of Britain, temporarily united and extended by Arthur, falls apart again in the absence of the king. This piling-up of conflict in the opening action immediately disturbs the prologue's promise of orderly chronology:

Ki vult oïr e vult saveir
 De rei en rei e d'eir en eir
 Ki cil furent e dunt il vindrent
 Ki Engleterre primes tindrent,
 Quels reis i ad en ordre eü,
 E qui anceis e ki puis fu,
 Maistre Wace l'ad translaté
 Ki en conte la verité. (ll. 1-8)

Whoever wishes to hear and to know about the successive kings and their heirs who once upon a time were the rulers of England – who they were, whence they came, what was their sequence, who came earlier and who later – Master Wace has translated it and tells it truthfully.

In light of this, the episode of Brutus's journey to Britain almost seems like a prelude to the main action, with the Mediterranean appearing only as a setting for the preamble to the narrative proper. Yet to discount its significance on these grounds would be to deny its importance as a spatial counterpoint to Britain; while Brutus's new home is a land surrounded by water, the Mediterranean is water surrounded by land, and this enclosed sea is key to the evolving perceptions of people's relationship to land. Everywhere Brutus goes in the Mediterranean, whether alone or, later, with his people, the landscape bears the signs of human habitation. Whether their kings still rule or only their gods remain, the people living around the sea are, in one form or another, ever-present. In Greece, the Trojans continue to suffer because of the decisive defeat of an earlier generation, and despite the increase of their number (including, as the case of Assaracus demonstrates, through intermarriage between Greeks and Trojans) they have not been able to avoid being enslaved. This is one of the most pointed resonances with the later parts of the poem, as Brutus's kin persuade him to lead a rebellion:

D'omes esteient grant compaine;
 Se il eüssent chevetaine
 Kis maintenist e enseinnast
 E en bataille les menast,
 Legerement les purreit l'on
 Mettre fors de chaitivesun;
 Entr'els aveit bien set milliers
 De bons e de pruz chivaliers,
 Estre geldë, estre servanz,
 E estre femmes e enfanz;
 E se il les vuleit guier,
 A duc le fereient lever,
 Kar mult suffereient grant fais
 Pur vivre senz servage en pais,
 N'i aveit nul ke n'en fust bel. (ll. 171-85)

They were a great band of men: if they had a leader to support and teach them and lead them in battle, he could easily deliver them from captivity. Between them there were a good seven thousand fine brave knights, besides foot-soldiers, servants, women and children, and if he wished to lead them, they would raise him to a duke, for they would willingly suffer great distress in order to live in peace, free from servitude: this was pleasing to one and all.

This passage raises the question: why, if they have such a capable body of fighting men, have the Trojans not risen against their captors before now? This may be explained by reference to Wace's perfunctory description of Arthur's transfer to Avalon after his fight against Mordred; when he says 'Encore i est, Bretun l'atendent' (l. 13279: he is still there, awaited by the Britons) he draws on the prophecies of Merlin, incorporated into Geoffrey's work but omitted from his own. Less ambiguous than Merlin's prophecy of the mysterious end of 'the Boar', this claim that the Britons expect Arthur to return one day to lead them creates a link between them in their fractured and powerless state in Wales at the end of the poem and the still-to-be-liberated Trojans. It is not stated openly that the Trojans were waiting for Brutus, but the parallel is clear. The major difference is that, though Brutus is a descendant of the king who fell with his city, he has never been a king himself. His position at the head of the narrative, in a section which could in some respects be seen as separable from the rest of the text, makes him a truly initiatory figure. The island which is perhaps taken for granted elsewhere has to be found by him. In his travel from the sea at the heart of antiquity to a new home beyond the continent, he is a forerunner to the knights of *Cligès*, whose narrative of the journey from Constantinople to Britain is interpolated into this manuscript at the point where the tempo of Arthur's history is slowed down by Wace's often-quoted disclaimer:

En cele grant pais ke jo di,
 Ne sai si vus l'avez oï,
 Furent les merveilles pruvees
 E les aventures truvees
 Ki d'Artur sunt tant recuntees
 Ke a fable sunt aturnees:
 Ne tut mençunge, ne tut veir,
 Ne tut folie ne tut saveir.
 Tant unt li cunteür cunté
 E li fableür tant flablé
 Pur lur cuntes enbeleter,
 Que tut unt fait fable sembler. (ll. 9787-98)

In this time of great peace I speak of – I do not know if you have heard of it – the wondrous events appeared and the adventures were sought out which [...] are so often told about Arthur that they have become the stuff of fiction: not all lies, not all truth, neither total folly nor total wisdom. The raconteurs have told so many yarns, the story-tellers so many stories, to embellish their tales that they have made it all appear fiction.

Wace's apparent reservation about the value of the yarns spun around Arthur might be taken as an oblique comment on the very interpretation of the place where these events occur. The ambiguity of these narratives is mirrored in the distinctions between the successive occupiers of Britain, which is peopled by giants prior to the arrival of the Trojans. Brutus's status as a pioneer is underscored by the fact that the land he clears to make way for his own people is not inhabited by distant relations or figures with whom he might identify in some other way, but monsters, whose stones, clubs and stakes are no match for the Trojans' spears, lances, swords and barbed arrows (ll. 1085–1099). The Trojans rapidly overcome the giants, continuing to display the military prowess they demonstrated in their exploits against the Poitevins. Yet the scene in which the giants are finally defeated – Corineus' victory over Gogmagog in hand-to-hand combat – foreshadows the uncertainties of territorial possession and boundary definition haunting the poem²⁰:

²⁰ James Simpson observes the potential for giants to disturb notions of sequential historical certainties by linking the later episode of Arthur's slaying the giant of Mont St Michel with the giants' sexualized torture of Cadoc in Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*, an incident which revives a monstrous order presumed to have been eliminated: 'It can be argued that in the history Chrétien elaborates what the giants attempt is to undo the shift marked by Arthur's affirmation and conclusion of the project of expropriation that begins with the arrival of Brutus. [...] In its potentially cataclysmic implications for chivalry's attempt to ally itself with the regulatory force of the Law, the giants' intentions are both *unseeable* in their shaming, debasing intent and *unthinkable* for the unsettling ambiguities they open up.' Simpson, *Troubling Arthurian Histories: Court*

Corineüs, qui fud bleciez,
 A quant qu'il pout s'est auciez,
 Le gaïant traist de tel aïr
 Que les costes li fist fruissir;
 Un poi aval l'ad recovré
 Si l'ad contre sun piz levé,
 A un derube l'ad porté
 Entre ses braz trestut pasmé;
 Ovri ses mains, lascha ses braz,
 Cil fud pesanz, si prist tel quaz
 Aval la faleise el rochier,
 N'i remist os a depescier;
 La mer tut environ rogi
 Del sanc ki del cors expandi.
 Li leus out puis le nun e a
 Del gaïant qu'illuec trebuchá. (ll. 1153–68)

Corineus, wounded, got to his feet again as fast as he could and pulled the giant to him with such fury that he smashed his sides. He pulled him down a little way, raised him against his chest, and carried him, quite unconscious, in his arms to a cliff. He opened his hands, and let go with his arms. The giant was heavy and crashed so hard down the cliff into the rocks that not a bone remained unbroken. All around, the sea reddened with the blood spilt from the body. The place then took the name, which it still has, of the giant who fell there.

In spite of Corineus's emphatic triumph over his opponent, several points raised by this brief passage suggest a more ambiguous interpretation of events. The way he smashes Gogmagog's sides as he pulls the giant towards him suggests a danger in proximity, a martial gesture resembling an embrace; earlier in the fight we are told that 'Par detriés les dos s'enbracerent, / Par grant aïr lur mains lacerent' (ll. 1121-22: 'They embraced each other behind their backs, angrily locking hands'). The threat of violence in physical intimacy anticipates later scenes, notably the Saxons' massacre of Vortigern's subjects, but also the mêlée of British and Roman forces following the retreat of Arthur's messengers from Lucius' court, where the two sides are mingled (ll. 12037-40). However, in this latter incident there is no element of surprise or intention to deceive on either side, rather the fury of the scene blurs the distinction between the two groups competing to occupy the same space.

This version of how Corineus disposes of the giant differs from Geoffrey's, and a comparison of these two passages underlines how Wace imbues his account of the fight itself with much more energy and drama than does his source. Wace's version represents this symbolically-charged moment with a much greater degree of realism, which may have been appreciated by his secular aristocratic audience, but it also makes a troubling point about the contingent nature of victory. Where the French text's Corineus drags Gogmagog to the edge of the cliff and lets him drop over it, the Latin Corineus still has the energy and strength, even with three broken ribs, to perform an altogether more spectacular feat:

He lifted the giant on his shoulders and ran to the nearby shore as fast as his burden would allow. Coming to the edge of a high cliff, he hurled over the fearful monster he bore on his shoulders, casting him into the sea. As he fell down the rocky crag, the giant was torn into a thousand pieces and stained the sea red with his blood.²¹

The vision of the 'monster' being 'hurled' is an unambiguously victorious moment of expulsion, especially when compared with Wace's poem's crunching, smashing tumble down the cliff face.²² Similarly, the motions described in the *Brut* give the impression that the broken body remains near the bottom of the cliff, and so the blood that drains away from Gogmagog into the water is not just a sign of the breakdown of the boundary between interior and exterior; it can also be figured as a hyperbolically gruesome transgression of the boundary between land and sea.²³ The giant's blood stains the edge

²¹ 1. 483-87: 'imposuit illum humeris suis et quantum uelocitas pro pondere sinebat ad proxima littora cucurrit. Deinde, summitatem excelsae rupis nactus, excussit se et praedictum letabile monstrum, quod super humeros suos ferebat, infra mare proiecit. At ille, per abrupta saxorum cadens, in mille frusta dilaceratus est et fluctus sanguine maculauit.'

²² This portrayal of a less emphatic victory may be a precursor to the failure of might to determine right in Arthur's final battle, undermining the poem's assertion of the legitimacy of colonial conquest: 'The most troubling aspect of this final encounter is perhaps not that Arthur loses but that no one wins. If force cannot reliably clarify rights on the battlefield, then legitimate dominion cannot in fact be established. The absence of a winner signals the depth of the cultural breakdown at the end of the Arthurian era.' (Warren, p. 170).

²³ Mittman's analysis of the positioning of the monstrous duo Gog and Magog on world maps comments that, on account of the wall built by Alexander the Great to contain them, they become synonymous with potential threat managed through the construction of physical barriers. Nevertheless, the references to them in the Bible insist upon their being a real threat, and further, one which is connected to the apocalypse, making their proximity to Britain in these maps all the more uncomfortable: 'Both lands [i.e. Britain and the dwelling-place of Gog and Magog] form part of the great monstrous ring, far from Jerusalem and the Holy Land, which separates the *ecumene* from the "boundless ocean" which surrounds it.' (Mittman, p. 58). We ought also to recall how Britain's ambiguous island status – 'chief' expressing both primacy and marginality – is invoked in Cassibellán's rebuff to Caesar:

'Nus, ki el chief del mund manons,

of Brutus's new kingdom, and even though the Trojans' victory over the island's previous occupants is commemorated in the name given to the place where the last giant fell, the incident fails to banish the gigantic shadow of otherness.²⁴ Unlike Warren, I see the *Roman de Brut*'s representation of successive transfers of power as betraying a subtle but pervasive insecurity.²⁵

A later hostile encounter between a Briton and a giant opponent echoes some of these problems, but goes further towards portraying the triumph of man over giant as a heroic act. Gogmagog's status as the last of the giants in Britain places him as part of a lost community, unlike Dinabuc, the giant of Mont St Michel, who appears as a singular challenger to Arthur. Mont St Michel is in itself a curiously ambiguous location; the site of a Norman monastery by the time Wace writes, it functions as a miniature of both Arthurian and Norman conquest, but as it is a tidal island it is neither definitively separate from the mainland nor an extension of it. In the prelude to Arthur's encounter with the giant, we learn several pieces of information substantiating a view of this incident as distinct from the clashes between the Trojan-Britons and the giants of Albion. The multiple narrations of Dinabuc's villainy, first by rumour, then by Eleine's nurse to Bedoer, and finally by Bedoer to Arthur, make him the subject of stories before he becomes a visible adversary. Gogmagog, on the other hand, has no individual history prior to his fight against Corineus, and his destructiveness is witnessed first-hand. In the earlier encounter, combat with the giants is necessary for the Trojans to secure their new kingdom, while Dinabuc furnishes Arthur with an opportunity to prove his prowess and

En un ille que nus tenons,
Ne vuelent Romain trespasser
Ainz nus funt treü demander.' (ll. 3915-18)

'The Romans have no intention of overlooking us, living on the edge of the world in an island we possess, but demand tribute of us.'

²⁴ The connection between monstrous beings and liminal spaces is, of course, well attested in literary and factual sources alike, with the points at which land and water meet particularly prominent in the representation of creatures like Grendel. It is perhaps unsurprising that Seamus Heaney, who repeatedly returns to the image of the bog in his poetry, should have also translated *Beowulf*: 'For Heaney the bog and its processes of decay and digestion, death and life, are 'the vowel of the earth' rather than the bowels of the earth.' Rodney James Giblett, *Postmodern Wetlands: Culture, History, Ecology*, Postmodern Theory (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 247

²⁵ 'Each successive passage of dominion takes place in a *novels lieux* that effaces prior claims. The new place redounds to the honor of the conquering group – and the memory of the old only to the historian.' (Warren, p. 145).

demonstrate the values of his expanding empire.²⁶ His conquest of the obscenely corporeal giant through his mastery of 'the limits of the flesh' distinguishes him as one who can take possession without being possessed, deformed or consumed himself.²⁷ This notion of boundary control is intimately connected to Arthur's outward expansion of his lands in this part of the text, and the formal gestures of displaying Dinabuc's severed head and building a chapel in memory of one of his victims draw a line under these events in a much more clean-cut way than in Corineus's conquest of Gogmagog.

A similar glossing over of troublesome elements occurs in Wace's rendering of Arthur's previous encounter with Rithon, another giant (ll. 11561-92). The unsettling object in this tale, recounted by Arthur following his defeat of Dinabuc, is the cloak made from the beards of all the kings Rithon had fought and vanquished. The giant challenges Arthur to fight him for the cloak, offering him the honour of using his beard to edge his grotesque trophy if he should triumph: 'La sue barbe enurereit / E a ses pels urle en fereit.' (ll. 11577-78). What Wace adds in his interpretation of this story is the proposal that the loser's beard be used as a border to the cloak; Geoffrey simply says that it will have a position which reflects Arthur's high status. Wace's inclusion of this particular detail is further evidence of his concern with the contingency of borders and boundaries, especially given that this proposed edge is made up from a part of the loser's body. In spite of this being an anecdote within an interlude, and therefore at a remove from the main narrative of territorial expansion towards Rome, the story of Arthur's encounter with Rithon offers an intriguing – and prophetic – image of the uneasy relationship between centre and margin, one which can only be effaced by the rejection of the gruesome trophy and return to the work of commemoration and military action.

²⁶ Geraldine Heng's reading of this incident in Geoffrey's *Historia* sees the commemoration of Helena as the point at which history simultaneously generates and is overwritten by romance: 'As a site of mourning without melancholia, Helena's Tomb marks the precise location in culture where historical trauma is successfully introjected and memorialized within the medieval cultural imaginary. Simultaneously the vanishing point of history and the instantiation of cultural fantasy, the moment is productive of, and defines, romance.' Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia, 2003), pp. 44-45.

²⁷ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages*. Medieval Cultures (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 70.

2. Filling out the story: women and genealogy

In the broader chronological sequence observed in several of the *Roman de Brut* manuscripts, the endeavours of Trojan imperialism seem to reach their apogee as Eneas marries Lavine and becomes grafted to the stock of Latin kings. What the tight time-frame of the *Roman d'Eneas* displaces from the narrative, however, is the question of whether the people he brought with him were able to marry into the local population. The intensity of the contest for the right to marry Lavine, into which the *Eneas* poet incorporates the dimension of 'amor de lonh', makes the hero (and his opponent) responsible for the fate of an entire people, yet those people are rarely spotted. The challenges arising from prohibitions on who could marry whom are, conversely, of great significance in the *Roman de Brut*. Starting from a reading of Brutus' marriage negotiations, we can identify other examples of troubled intermarriage involving groups regarding themselves as distinct, and these may be drawn together as a point of comparison with the genealogical concerns in writing about saints. The case of Edward the Confessor is particularly thought-provoking, as it amalgamates dynastic and political considerations with the king's vow of celibacy within marriage.²⁸ The transference of these concerns from hagiographic to pseudo-historical mode strengthens the connection between people and place, since the emphasis on the kingdom of heaven in chronological works like the *Roman de Brut* is drastically curtailed. Where saints' lives promote the belief that the behaviour of the living will determine their course in the hereafter, the *Roman de Brut* deals with the secular problems of succession and inheritance, of which marriage and maternity are integral components. Arthur's comment to his troops on the inferiority of the Romans – 'femmes valent altretant' (l. 12430: women are worth as much) – may appear throwaway, but it underestimates the importance of women to the establishment of successful, sustainable settlements. Given *Brut's* chronological and codicological ties with the *Roman d'Eneas*, this comment evokes Camille and her female army, reminding us of the disquieting nature of the Britons' Italian prehistory. Wace's text is effectively a study of aftermaths, which the narrative and poetic ethos of romance and hagiography can defer but not completely escape.

²⁸ This connection is especially clear in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 1416, in which Wace's brief (and chronologically misplaced) reference to Edward the Elder is replaced with the 4000-line *Vie de saint Edouard* by the anonymous Nun of Barking.

Brutus' first opportunity to demonstrate his powers as leader of a community is his marshalling of the Trojan exiles in Greece into an army. They defeat the king of Greece, and Menbitius advises Brutus to lead them away to a new land rather than try to assert dominion over the lands of those they have conquered:

Jamais as Greus nen avrom pais,
 Kar il n'ublierunt jamais
 Lur parenz, lur uncles, lur peres,
 Lur cosins, lur nevus, lur freres
 Ne lur altres amis precains
 Que nus avum morz a noz mains.
 Sachiez que il les vengerunt
 Des que tens e leu en verrunt.
 Mult est fols ki el en espeire,
 Ja, dit l'on, cui mal faiz nel creire;
 Jamais ne crerrai lur manaie;
 De viez mesfait nuvele plaie. (Il. 529-40)

We shall never be at peace with the Greeks, for they will never forget their kin, their uncles, fathers, cousins, nephews, brothers or their other close friends who have died at our hands. Be sure they will avenge them as soon as they have the time and the place. Anyone who hopes for anything else is mad; an evil-doer can never be trusted. I will never believe in their mercy: fresh wounds will come from old wrongs.

In this litany of possible relationships between men, we also see the inter-relation between the dead and the living, serving both to tie the Greeks to this territory and to permanently exclude the Trojans from it. These unforgettable wrongs wrought upon the Greeks by the Trojans are not construed by Brutus or any other figure as acts of vengeance specifically for the sack of Troy; they are instead justified by the contemporary fight for freedom by an enslaved population, the dishonoured 'lignage / Dardani al bon anceseur' (Il. 228-29), who have laboured under the yoke of 'hunte' and 'viltage'. There is no reference to the Trojan wars or the circumstances leading to their captivity. More importantly, though, this reframing of the Trojan people as the heirs of Dardanus implicitly links them back to Italy rather than Troy, and, like Eneas's repeated statement of who his people are and where they came from, it elides the complications of Trojan history since the founding of the now-lost nation. Brutus is cast as a liberator, not as an avenger. Furthermore, in acting upon the intervention by Membitius and making a swift escape he forecloses the possibility of future acts of vengeance upon the new nation coalescing around Priam's descendants.

There remains, however, the matter of a political marriage to seal the peace between Brutus and the unnamed Greek king, and Innogen is given to the Trojan chief;

‘Ma fille avrez, n’en pus faire el,
 Mais a mun enimi mortel,
 A cruel home e a felun
 La durrai, u jo voille u nun;
 Mais alques me confortera
 Ke gentilz hom e pruz l’avra.
 [...]
 E si vus veneit a talent
 K’en cest païs remansissiez,
 Tuit franc e quite serriez,
 Si vus durreie par esguard
 De ma terre la tierce part.’ (ll. 577-82, 586-90)

‘You shall have my daughter, I can’t do otherwise; but I’m giving her, whether I like it or not, to my mortal enemy, a cruel and wicked man. But it is some comfort that a brave and nobly-born man will have her. [...] should you wish to stay in this land, you will be quite free and at liberty, and I will give you, as is just, the third part of my land.’

Innogen’s father, who is held captive by Brutus after the Trojan rebellion, grudgingly consents to his request, his reluctance only tempered by his future son-in-law’s royal heritage and physical prowess. Nevertheless, as Menbitius argued previously, the implied honour in the offer of shared occupancy of the kingdom cannot possibly be accepted if the Trojans are to survive in the longer term. This effectively clears the way for Brutus’s colonization to begin – he has a wife with whom he will perpetuate his own line, and enough people to populate a new territory. The Greek lands offered to him are already too loaded with resentful memories for them to be able to accommodate a new settlement, especially one with a recent diplomatic record as inflammatory as that of the Trojans.²⁹ Brutus’s rejection of land in an archipelago reflects the desire for mastery of a land which is both physically and symbolically whole.

²⁹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s reading of this episode in Geoffrey sees Innogen’s tearful departure from a home she will never see again as a suspension in the action, but it is also a moment in which an uneasy hybrid origin for the British people comes into view through a minor figure in the text: ‘She is not mentioned again. Her children divide the land and carry on their father’s work. It never occurs to them that in their bodies Troy mingles with Greece, that they possess hybrid blood in which two enemies have uneasily been conjoined. The sons of Brutus assume that they are simply Britons, as their father christened his people. They never dwell upon the complexities of history or descent.’ Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles*, The New Middle Ages Series (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 75.

In considering the issues of marriage, reproduction and territorial possession, we can identify in the British branch of the descendants of Troy a worrying reflection upon the conclusions of the *Eneas*. The initial increase of the population of Brutus's tribe comes from their encounters with other exiled Trojans as they cross the Mediterranean. This may be read as a positive development, a reassembly of what had been broken up and scattered, but the triumphant and somewhat disingenuous ending of the *Eneas*, reckoned to have been composed up to five years after the completion of the *Roman de Brut*, seeks to install a vision of unity and completion which smoothes over the problems and contradictions apparent in the *longue durée* of Wace's poem and its Latin and vernacular intertexts:

Ainssi vint la latine terre
 A Eneas, qui premerains
 Des royaus la tint en ses mainz
 Puis que il ot conquis Turnus.
 L'istoire faut, il n'i a plus
 Qu'a metre face en memoire. (*Roman d'Eneas*, ll. 10326-31)

Thus the Latin lands came to Eneas, who was the first king to rule them because he had defeated Turnus. The story ends here, there is nothing left that deserves to be remembered.

The reduction of the Trojan people's quest to establish a new home is finally narrowed down to one man. In the *Roman de Brut*, however, the continuing struggle to maintain their population from generation to generation is periodically complicated by the restrictions placed on intermarriage. This is first seen in the actions of Ebrauc, Brutus's great-great-grandson, who sends his thirty daughters to Lombardy:

Tutes furent bien conrees
 E en Lombardie menees
 Al rei Silvium lur parent
 Kis maria mult richement
 As ligniedes as Troïens;
 Kar il aveit esté lunc tens
 Que les femes de Lombardie,
 Jo ne sai par quel felonie,
 Ne vodrent prendre mariage
 As Troïens n'a lur lignage,
 Pur ceo furent cestes mandees
 E la as Troïens donees. (ll. 1571-82)

All of them were handsomely arrayed and taken to Lombardy, to their relation king Silvius, who made them splendid marriages with men of Trojan descent, because for a long time the women of Lombardy, for what wicked reason I know not, had not wanted to marry Trojans nor their descendants. For this reason these girls were sent for and there given to Trojans.

The first free Trojan settlement after the fall of Troy, which seemed secure at the end of the *Eneas* and even in the opening passage of the *Brut*, has clearly not been entirely successful in establishing itself as a sustainable settlement integrated into the wider population of Italy. The Trojan diaspora must become a mutually supportive community through sharing of resources to ensure its survival. However, this rejection is framed in terms of the choices made by the Lombard women, and does not appear to imply any legal prohibition of marriage between them and the settlers.³⁰ It is perhaps also worth noting that Ebrauc is ‘li premiers ki par mer / Mut d’Engleterre aillurs rober’ (ll. 1501-2: ‘...the first who, crossing the sea, went off pillaging abroad, away from England’). This is both a strong statement on the importance of this king, who is not bound to his island, and the first time in the poem that the portion of the island passed to Brutus’s son Locrinus and now ruled by Ebrauc is called England, apart from in the prologue. It might appear from these lines that England, the territory occupied by Wace’s Norman patrons at the time he was writing, only really comes into being through engagement with the wider world, albeit through piracy. We are reminded here that it was through looting and pillage that the Trojans led by Brutus were able to reach Britain and establish ‘Trinovant’, underlining the fundamental violence in the act of establishing bounded territories.

To return to the matter of marriage, however, legal prohibitions re-emerge later in the poem, when, in the period of Roman occupation of Britain, Rodric leads the Picts to Scotland. Rodric is swiftly eliminated by the British king Marius, and the surviving Picts are allowed to settle in Caithness ‘Qui encore esteit en guastine / Tuz tens laissiee a salvagine’ (ll. 5189-90: ‘...which was still waste-land, abandoned as wilderness from time immemorial.’). This abandoned place, though empty, is subject to the law of a king who is able to command its population, and so demonstrates the mastery of the territory by the

³⁰ We ought to note that while the Britons are no longer referred to as Trojans, those of their distant kin who were not sent into exile are here named by reference to the lands they had lost several generations earlier. In Brutus’s line, the last reference to Troy is in the name of his capital, ‘Trinovant’, whose etymology and afterlife as Lud, Kaerlu, Lodoïn, Londenë, and the contemporary Lundres, is traced by Wace (ll. 1223-38). This is shortly to be reflected in Ebrauc’s journeying away from the island, as it conveys the susceptibility of all territories – insular and continental – to invading and being invaded.

British, further differentiating them from the giants who previously inhabited the island. Nevertheless, the Picts' progress is hampered by ongoing hostility, which does not manifest itself in open warfare but in the politics of intermarriage:

De Bretagne femes requistrent,
 Mais li Bretun les escundistrent.
 E cil en Irlande passerent
 E de la femes amenerent.
 Par la terre se herbergierent,
 Tost crurent e multiplierent.' (ll. 5193-98)

They sought wives from the Britons but were refused, so they crossed into Ireland and brought back wives from there. Throughout the region they settled and soon grew and multiplied.

The shift in decision-making power invites comparison with the earlier rejection of the Britons' kin by the Lombard women.³¹ Compared with the shipping of Ebrauc's daughters to the spurned Trojans, it seems here that 'li Bretun' as a whole forbid the Picts from marrying their women. This prohibition, not accompanied by any slur on the character of the women as was seen in the case of the would-be wives of Lombardy, is a claim for the propriety of the Britons' conduct; they are merciful to those they have defeated, but reserve the right to forbid their people from mingling with their former enemies. A similar point is made in Cunan's settlement of Brittany, where the sequence of clearing the land and insisting on endogamous marriage is enacted again:

Pur sa terre mielz guaanier,
 Pur pupler e pur herbergier,
 E pur sa gent asseürer,
 Volt as humes femes duner.
 Ne lur volt pas doner Franceises,
 Ne pur force, ne pur richeises,
 Ne lur lignage entremeller
 Ne lur terres acomuner. (ll. 6005-12)

To cultivate his land better, to occupy and people it and ensure the safety of his men, he wanted to give them wives. He did not want to give them Frenchwomen, using either gifts or force, nor to intermingle their races, nor to join their countries.

³¹ It also invites reflection upon the southern European origin of the exiles who, on the recommendation of Gurguint, first settle in Ireland (ll. 3283-300). The phrasing of the episode places Gurguint as master of his own lands, saviour of a vulnerable party, and a donor of what is represented as virgin territory (ll. 3307-12).

The overwhelmingly negative language used to describe Cunan's policy underscores the extent to which the politics of genealogy are used as a means for preserving national identity through exclusion. The bodies of women are part of a strategy of nation-building through control of marriage, and they reinforce the line between 'us' and 'them' that the leaders of the British persistently attempt to draw.³² Repeated use of the vocabulary of cultivation, here and elsewhere, draws attention to the ongoing tensions between groups seeking to pin their identity to a territorial base.

3. Historical obtrusion: Merlin and Stonehenge

A further complication to the notion of the *Roman de Brut* as a linear or monologic history may be discerned in the twinning of two elements of the supernatural, Merlin and the stone circle named the Giants' Dance (usually identified with Stonehenge). Comparison of these elements strengthens the sense of their inexplicable powers, which sit uneasily with the political and imperial machinations of the ruling classes of the poem, and which undermine the work of consolidation the magician and the monument appear to support.

Wace's interpretation of Merlin's paternity and conception invokes the resolutely corporeal image of Christ, and bears some of the hallmarks of the demonic delusions thought by John of Salisbury, Wace's contemporary, to prey on the feeble-minded³³:

'Quant jo fui alques grant nurrie,
Ne sai se fu fantosmerie,
Une chose veneit suvent
Ki me baisout estreitement.
Cumë hume parler l'oeie,
E cumë hume le senteie,
E plusurs feiz od mei parlout
Que neient ne se demustrout.

³² This colonizing strategy of maintaining endogamy among the Britons in Brittany/Armorica contrasts strikingly with the marriage of Brutus to a Greek princess as part of the political process securing the freedom of the enslaved Trojans; see Cohen, *Hybridity, Monstrosity and Identity*, p. 75.

³³ *Policraticus*, 2. 17. Merlin's mother's account appears to foreshadow Merlin's own warning to the king regarding the desire for knowledge of the supernatural, but the control the prophet exercises in his mediation between natural and supernatural worlds places him apart from those susceptible to incubus demons.

Tant m'i ala issi aprismant
 E tant m'ala suvent baisant,
 Od mei se culcha si conçui,
 Unches hume plus ne conui.' (ll. 7421-32)

'When I was a full-grown novice, some thing – I don't know if it was an apparition – often came to me and kissed me intimately. I heard it speak like a man; I felt it as if it were a man, and many times it spoke with me, without ever making itself known. So long did it continue to approach me and to kiss me that it lay with me and I conceived. I knew no other man.'

In comparison with this very physical, human form, the advice of Vortigern's counsellors regarding 'incubi demones' is rather dismissive:

Incubi demones unt nun;
 Par tut l'eir unt lur region,
 E en la terre unt lur repaire.
 Ne püent mie grant mal faire;
 Ne püent mie mult noisir
 Fors de gaber e d'escharnir. (ll. 7445-50)

They are called incubus demons; their realm is the air and they frequent the earth. They cannot do great wickedness, they cannot cause much harm except deceive and deride.

Wace downplays the power of incubus demons by adding the comment that they have little power to do any real harm, though the adviser Maganz concedes that what the woman says may be true, mentioning other similar cases: 'Mainte meschine unt deceüe / E en tel guise purgeüe' (ll. 7453-54). In his application of unspecified precedent, as opposed to Geoffrey's citation of Apuleius' *De deo Socratis*, he appears to give a reasoned endorsement of the mother's story without calling to mind an overtly pagan source.³⁴ Such supernatural parentage also recalls Eneas, son and beneficiary of Venus, and while Lavine's mother's savage condemnation of the Trojan leader emphasizes his reputed deviation from reproductive sexuality rather than the nature of his own parentage, this comparison nevertheless invites us to consider questions of legitimate paternal

³⁴ Geoffrey of Monmouth, 6. 545-47. See also Simpson on the horrific spectre of the Thracian law in Chrétien's *Philomena*; adapted from Ovid's version in the *Metamorphoses*, Chrétien's poem enters into paradoxical dialogue with both it and the presumptions of his squeamish twelfth-century audience, discomfited by the thought of reviving profane poetry and with it the questionable morals of its authors (pp. 181-82).

authority.³⁵ The spectral nature of the father also recalls the queen's dream of the heavenly saint in the *Vie de sainte Catherine*; in Clemence's poem, what the queen sees in her dream is the company of Christ and the saint, who crown her with a token whose worth far outstrips any attached to her through her marriage to Maxence, and thus they represent the 'true' authority. Nancy Vine Durling sees this concern with supernatural paternity as a key theme in this work, and one which is partially expressed through the practice of translation.³⁶ The *Roman de Brut*, concerned as it is with inheritance and the transmission of wealth (particularly land) from one generation to another, seems to be at odds with this child who has inherited nothing because, as Maganz claims, his father does not actually exist. Yet it is through Merlin, Durling argues, that Arthur is in some sense permitted to participate in familial regeneration; 'Merlin's prophecies act as a poetic substitute for natural paternity, which is unavailable to Arthur.'³⁷ This also links Merlin back to Brutus, as both inherit nothing but are defined as originators, whether of prophecies or of nations. Both the substance of the prophecies and the very idea of this occult figure as speaking with the voice of a father in a place where prophecy is at odds with the order of nature (unlike the prophecies of Anchises in the underworld) further insinuates Arthur's own oddness and presages his doom.

Wace's omission of Merlin's prophecies has been claimed as a strategy for downplaying the fantastical elements of his source and making his poem more palatable to an audience seeking a realistic and factually-based historical account rather than one with supernatural overtones. On the particularly political dimension to this editorial decision, Jean Blacker comments: 'While it is possible to consider the omission of the prophecies as indicating a lessening of political import and implication, it is equally possible to consider it as just the opposite: as a move made not to avoid politics, but a political move made to avoid the wrong kind of politics.'³⁸ This may indeed have been the intention, but I believe

³⁵ 'Homophobia in the *Eneas* may reflect anxieties about homosexuality, but its effect is to mark Eneas's conformity to a prescribed norm.' (Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 81)

³⁶ Durling, 'Translation and Innovation in the *Roman de Brut*,' *Medieval Translators and Their Craft*, ed. by Jeanette Beer (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1989), pp. 9-39 (pp. 24-27).

³⁷ Durling, 'Translation and Innovation', p. 27.

³⁸ Blacker, "'Ne vuil sun livre translater': Wace's Omission of Merlin's Prophecies from the *Roman de Brut*," in *Anglo-Norman Anniversary Essays*, ed. by Ian Short (London: Anglo-Norman Texts Society, 1993), pp. 49-59 (p. 52). See also Dolores Buttry, 'Authority Refracted: Personal Principle and Translation in Wace's *Roman de Brut*,' in *The Politics of Translation in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Luise von Flotow and Daniel Russell, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*

that the exclusion of the prophecies is part of an impression which – perhaps inadvertently – makes the figure of Merlin himself more mysterious by obscuring his methods. Wace elucidates Merlin's powers in a more subtle way, by focusing on his logistical role in moving the Giants' Dance from Ireland to Cornwall. The refusal to confirm whether or not he uses magic to move the stones might be read as a hint back to the mysteriously mobile Trojan gods of Alba (ll. 91-104). This space of uncertainty makes sense as an element in the highly ambiguous representation of Merlin, son of a nun and a demon:

'Traiez vus, dist Merlin, en sus,
Ja par force nen ferez plus.
Or verrez engin e saveir
Mielz que vertu de cors valeir.'
Dunc ala vant si s'estut,
Entur guarda, les levres mut
Comë huem ki dit oreisun;
Ne sai s'il dist preiere u nun. (ll. 8143-50)

'Rise,' said Merlin, 'you will do no more by force. Now you shall see how knowledge and skill are better than bodily strength.' Then he stepped forward and stopped. He looked around, his lips moving like a man saying his prayers. I don't know if he said a prayer or not.

This statement of incomplete knowledge is consistent with other instances in the poem such as Wace's frequent speculation on the origins of place names.³⁹ Given his self-proclaimed status as chronicler (see ll. 1-8, quoted above), this comment seems to contrast with the rhetorical withholding of information in such examples as the Carthage of the *Eneas*, where hyperbole exhausts itself as the author claims that the spectacle in question is beyond description. It might also be contrasted with such moments as the failure to interpret correctly marvellous events, a major point of distinction between the saved and the damned in saints' lives; for example, when the imperial official Dion breaks down before Christina and admits 'ne sai que plus te die' (l. 2611: 'I don't know what else I can say to you'), running out of words becomes synonymous with the limits of comprehension. We should also be sensitive here to the temporal disjunction between

(Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2001), pp. 85-106; Jeff Rider, 'The Fictional Margin: The Merlin of the *Brut*', *Modern Philology*, 87. 1 (1989), 1-12.

³⁹ Warren draws a connection between Wace's comments on knowledge and his representation of colonial endeavour: 'by representing the bounds of historical knowledge, Wace identifies a colonizing vision that denies partialities and ambiguities: historiography dominates information.' (p. 138).

narrator and subject matter, but is Wace simply being honest in his treatment of contradictory sources (both Geoffrey and the First Variant are more decisive in their representation of this episode, with the former attributing the movement of the stones to mechanical means while the Variant claims it as magical), or is there a more subtle significance to his refusal to explain this phenomenon?

To answer this question, we must look more closely at how the Giants' Dance is represented in the poem. What purpose does bringing it to Britain serve? Does it maintain this significance from generation to generation? It is first mentioned by Merlin as an appropriate monument to Aurelius, following Merlin's refusal to give the king the benefit of his foreknowledge:

'Sire, dist Merlin, nu ferai,
 Ja ma buche nen uverai
 Se n'est par grant necesseté
 E dunc par grant humilité.
 Se jon parloe par vantance
 Ne par eschar ne par bobance,
 Li espirites que jo ai,
 Par ki jo sai ço que jo sai,
 De ma buche se retrareit
 E ma science me toldreit,
 Ne ma buche ne parlereit
 Plus ke buche d'autre fereit.
 Lai ester les devins segreiz;
 Pense de ço que faire deiz.
 Se tu vuels faire ovre durable,
 Ki mult seit bele e covenable
 E dunt tuz tens seit mais parole,
 Fai ci apporter la carole
 Que gaiant firent en Irlande
 Une merveilluse ovre e grande
 De pieres en un cerne assises,
 Les unes sur les autres mises.' (ll. 8025-46)

'My lord,' said Merlin, 'I will not do so; I will never open my mouth unless it is really necessary, and then only with great humility. If I spoke boastfully, in jest, or arrogantly, the spirit I possess, from whom I know what I know, would leave my mouth and take my knowledge with him, and my mouth would no longer speak differently from any other. Leave secret divination alone; think of what you must do. If you wish to create a durable monument, beautiful and fitting, and remembered forever, have the Giant's Dance brought here, made in Ireland. It is a large and marvellous work of stones set in a circle, one on top of another.'

In a poem which omits the entire book of Merlin's prophecies and obscures his methods, this command to 'lai ester les devins segreiz' becomes all the more meaningful. Through the mere reference to 'secret divination', and the positioning of himself as an intermediary between two authorities, he draws attention to alternative histories known to 'li esperites' but beyond the ken of Merlin's audience, who must deal in the stuff of the sensible world. The construction of this monument is a sign of self-confidence, as is the desire to be remembered for generations, though it should be noted that this hubristic note is introduced by Merlin, not by Aurelius himself. The 'covenable' quality of the monument draws together its moment in time and the individual in whose honour it is to be erected, while the reference to future memory of this structure is less prophetic than political. Yet Weiss's translation elides the verbal dimension by rendering 'parole' in terms of memory; as is clear from his rigorous distinction between what he may and may not say, speech is vitally important in matters concerning Merlin, especially since it is an enigmatic speech act which makes the transportation of the stones possible. Future witnesses to the monument may well talk about it, but that is no guarantee that they will have any knowledge of what it is or what it signifies. Indeed, according to English Heritage, the body responsible for the monument today, 'the vision for the future is based on the need to conserve, enhance and interpret the significance of the Stonehenge World Heritage Site.'⁴⁰ The value of the stone circle and the surrounding area to the twenty-first century economy of the south-west of England is clearly quantifiable, while enquiry into its origins is still work in progress. The structure which, in Merlin's discourse in the *Roman de Brut*, has a clear dynastic-political significance, has been reclassified under the umbrella of 'world heritage', with the future envisaged in terms of guaranteeing the survival of the site in spite of the current state of knowledge about it. This apparently banal statement on 'vision' and 'conservation' makes for an uncanny parallel with Merlin's argument for transferring the monument in a form of mystico-political *furta sacra*.

Key to this notion of the stones' inherent powers is Merlin's statement that the monument itself has a past prior to its being brought to Ireland. He claims that the stones were brought from Africa to Ireland by giants, and have healing properties. The

⁴⁰ <<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/stonehenge/world-heritage-sites/vision-for-the-future/>> [accessed 28th April 2011]

reference to giants might function as an uncomfortable reminder of the original inhabitants of Britain, but it is in the references to water that this resonance is most fully realized. The magical powers of the stones (which are not put to the test in this poem) are harnessed by collecting water which has been poured over them, as Merlin explains:

‘Les genz les soleient laver
E de l’eue les bainz temprer.
Cil ki esteient engroté
E d’alcune enferté grevé,
Des laveüres bainz feseient,
Bainoent sei si guarisseient
Ja pur enferté qu’il sentissent
Altre mecine ne quesissent.’ (ll. 8071-78)

‘People used to wash the stones and mingle this water with their baths. Those who were ill and suffering from any disease prepared baths from these cleansing waters, bathed themselves, and were cured; they never sought any other medicine, for whatever infirmity they might suffer.’

The link between giants and water recalls the toppling of Gogmagog and with him the gigantic occupants of Britain prior to the Trojans’ arrival. Water has the power to heal, but the spectacle of blood seeping into the sea is a taint upon the edge of the new kingdom, and the subsequent location of the stones in the same part of the island as ‘Gogmagog’s Leap’ (so-called by Geoffrey, but not named by Wace) underlines this connection. The Irish context also recalls an earlier episode in which a pre-Roman king, Gurguint, encounters a group of Spanish exiles at sea, and they tell him that they are seeking a new land, offering to serve him in return for settling in his kingdom. Gurguint refuses, but advises them to settle in Ireland, and the narrator adds ‘N’ert pas Irlande encore poplee / Ne de nule gent abitee’ (ll. 3307-08: Ireland was not yet peopled or inhabited by any race). This is almost identical to the formulations employed to describe the Trojan settlement of Britain; when they first arrive, the narrator says simply ‘En cele ille gaianz aveit, / Nule gent alter n’i maneit’ (ll. 1063-64: There were giants in this island: no-one else lived there), and he says of the kingdom under Brutus:

Bien tost fu la gent si creüe
E si par la terre expandue,
Vis vus fust que lunc tens eüst
Que Bretainne poplee fust. (ll. 1205-08)

Soon the people increased so much and spread so far through the land, you would have thought Britain had been populated for a long time.

In each of these islands, giants are believed by settlers to be either a troublesome but temporary threat or they effectively do not exist. The Irish giants, reputed by Merlin later in the text to have performed tremendous feats of strength, are not mentioned when the exiles from the continent are directed to the 'empty' island by Gurguint; this perhaps carries the retrospective subtext that the inhuman giants could not possibly have prevailed against their more 'civilized' adversaries.⁴¹ That the memory of giants and their power does however persist in the most carefully constructed places, such as Stonehenge and the tomb of Eleine, is a troublesome scar on civic confidence.

On the textual representation of relations between indigenous and occupying powers, Jeff Rider argues that, particularly in comparison with Layamon's *Brut*, the *Roman de Brut* is clearly anti-English, using the role of Merlin as a focal point for these two nationally-determined viewpoints.⁴² In *Brut*, he is a powerful and autonomous figure whose favour kings must carefully court. He is also more openly acclaimed as a magician. The *Roman de Brut*, Layamon's main source, appears to both downplay Merlin's influence and disregard the majority of his prophecies, to which Geoffrey dedicates an entire book in his prose work. But this does not, in my view, constitute a wholesale disregard for the British magician on Wace's part. His treatment of Merlin in the *Roman de Brut* is consistent with his admissions of incomplete knowledge elsewhere, but the difficulty in determining whether this work is history, romance, or a hybrid of the two problematizes any claim that this is simply honest chronicling. Wace's confession to gaps in his knowledge appears to place him among Merlin's audience who are urged not to enquire about things not of this world, as, like them, he does not have access to the occult knowledge of the prophet-magician. The poet-chronicler can, however, conjure drama from his material in the form of the spoken word. His rendering of Merlin's pronouncements on the superiority of intellect and cunning to physical force in denying the impossibility of moving the stones goes beyond Geoffrey's reported speech. When Aurelius laughs at

⁴¹ On the subject of the relationship between giants and political and cultural identity see Cohen, *Of Giants*, especially pp. 29-61. Cohen argues that the giants of 'Albion', in Geoffrey's interpretation, stand for grotesquely amplified physicality, one which also has an originating function in the definition of masculine identity: 'the giant [...] enables that foundational moment when the male child steps into his adult gender role and learns the monstrous, public origin of the "private," masculine body.' (p. 61).

⁴² Jeff Rider, 'The Fictional Margin: The Merlin of the *Brut*', *Modern Philology*, 87. 1 (1989), pp. 1-12

Merlin's suggestion of transporting stones from Ireland, pointing out that his own land is not lacking in stones, the magician replies:

'Reis, dist Merlin, dunc ne sez tu
Que engin surmunte vertu.
Bone est force e engin mienz valt;
La valt engin u force falt.
Engin e art funt mainte chose
Que force commencer nen ose.
Engin puet les pieres muveir
E par engin les poez avoir.' (ll. 8057-64)

'King,' answered Merlin, 'then you don't know that skill surpasses strength. Might is good, skill better; skill prevails where might fails. Skill and art achieve many things which might doesn't dare to start. Skill can move the stones and through skill you can possess them.'

'Engin', an ambiguous term suggesting both skill and deception, is repeated so insistently in Merlin's self-defence that this ambiguity becomes synonymous with his person and his methods. Wace is not exactly complimentary in his portrayal of Merlin, but his reduction of the narrative space allotted to him and elimination of the prophecies might be seen as making him more rather than less mysterious. In a similar manner to the marginalization of Constantine in Clemence's *Vie de sainte Catherine*, Wace's reshaping of the figure of Merlin is complemented by his rhetorical creation of a space beyond knowledge which periodically intrudes upon his narrative.

Conclusion

The loss of Troy may appear a marginal event in the narrative of the *Roman de Brut*, but as I have demonstrated, the reassembly of the Trojan diaspora is a tacit acknowledgement of the potential for destruction. The margins of the text (and those who dwell in them) play a more prominent and sometimes more disruptive role than may be expected in what the author-translator claims is a correct chronology of how power is passed 'de rei en rei e d'eir en eir' (l. 2: from king to king, and from heir to heir). They represent in both political and spatial terms the spiralling effect of genealogy and history

identified by Kathleen Biddick, which later medieval historians attempt to contain in the form of universal histories.⁴³

Braudel's notion of a 'greater Mediterranean' area, which connects the sea itself with its sphere of influence, offers a thought-provoking image into which we might insert our impressions of the 'island at the end of the world.' Britain can, as I have argued above, be figured as an inversion of the sea surrounded by land, but here we may have recourse to Geoffrey's image of the island-garden, dependent upon both soil and water for life. We are drawn back finally to that enclosed sea with its attenuated tides and murky histories, and might read it as a relation of the anomalous pools of standing water found in the territories described by poets Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts as 'edgelands', perpetually re-negotiated spaces where competing commercial uses intersect and reshape the landscape:

Left to itself, unmanaged, standing water quietly offers its opportunities to the wildlife edged out of our countryside by the homogenizing, flattening effects of agribusiness, a last refuge for those unlovable creatures that once dwelt in fens and meres and troughs, a place where things might start all over again.⁴⁴

Like these marginal pools, and Seamus Heaney's bogs, the island kingdom whose history Wace describes is a place whose boundaries are sites of indeterminacy and regeneration. Regardless of the place of origin of those who chronicle the rulers and events occurring on this island, there is an overwhelming sense that Britain's history must be written from the outside in. The identifiable tendencies of the *Roman de Brut* manuscripts, meanwhile, suggest that its narrative constitutes a space which is simultaneously hemmed in by chronological concerns and available as a site for literary innovation. It represents finally an ambiguous territorial possession where the disturbing – or thrilling – potential for things to start over again can never be eradicated.

⁴³ Biddick, 'Becoming Collection', p. 224.

⁴⁴ Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011), p. 78.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the inter-relation of place and narrative practices across texts from a range of genres. My readings of these texts have demonstrated the multiple ways in which place and the ways in which people relate to it both generate and necessitate stories. The ways in which stories are strategically concealed or revealed is crucial to understanding how medieval authors conceived of their worlds and audiences, and their treatment of acts of narration is a rich source for re-reading familiar texts. Whether place is understood and defined in terms of politics, topography, architecture or genealogy, it is a foundation to the stories people tell about themselves, their memories and their aspirations. By breaking off the chronological and narrative continuity between the *Roman d'Eneas* and the *Roman de Brut* I have attempted to demonstrate the interpenetration of the vernacular discourses of devotion with those of political and dynastic legitimation. The very act of moving the contextually 'historic' texts to the edges of my study and placing the lives and deeds of saints who have no desire to create or control places at the centre inverts the notion of hagiography as mere context to more glamorous genres of epic and romance. Such an approach breaks away from the image of the linear 'horizon of expectation', moving towards a filled-in landscape of narrative experience which is nevertheless punctuated with spaces as troublesome as the territory lying beyond that horizon; these include underworlds and purgatories, sites of inexplicable wonders and miracles, and cities and tents too fabulous to be true. In the construction of this discursive place, where reading becomes *haecceity*, we may observe numerous ways in which these texts reflect and inform one another.

The notion of a lost 'patria' is a strong theme, and we can compare, for example, the Italy of Eneas's ancestors with the Rome of Maxence's. While Eneas receives a frequently repeated guarantee from the gods and his dead father that he will regain the lands that Dardanus once held, Maxence's gods fail to prevent him from becoming an inadmissible remnant of an old order, one whose investment of identity in geographical place is all the stronger for its denial of an afterlife. The occupied territory of Catherine's Alexandria is a lost object of Christian desire, whose defeat of the pagan interloper installs it within a larger narrative of Christian territorial possession; the city is no less desirable to the Crusader forces who fought to regain it from Muslim control in the twelfth century.

Dido's Carthage, meanwhile, is doomed by the text to be an incomplete city, a lost middle place in the westward movement of *translatio imperii*, whose technological and artistic sophistication make it an otherworldly, almost unbearable space for land-seeking Trojans.

The representation of topography and architecture is another point upon which we could draw comparisons between disparate works' concerns with place, space, and the distinctions between them. Natural boundaries, such as the river Jordan in the *Vie de sainte Marie l'Egyptienne* and the cliff-top from which Gogmagog is dropped in the *Roman de Brut* serve to draw lines between groups or regions, for example, between civilization and wilderness, or between humans and monsters. While this might suggest that identity is rooted in geography, however, these texts subvert such essentialist certainties; the site where Zosimas discovers Mary's body is a 'lovely place' in the middle of the desert, and he is assisted by a wild beast in burying her, blurring the distinction between the un-navigable desert space and the holy place of the saint's burial. Likewise, the giant's blood draining into the sea at the foot of the cliff is a grossly physical reminder of the contingency of post-Trojan assertions of nationhood. In terms of the built environment and genealogical investment therein, we may see a parallel between the repurposing of the structures which become the tombs for Pallas and Christina. The young warrior placed in his father's tomb represents the breakdown of inheritance and points forward to the territorial gains of Eneas and his descendants, while Christina's interment in the tower-temple her father built to protect her from Christian influence redefines the virtue of chastity he had valued. The profane paradise is transformed into a route to the true heaven, recognized as such by the newly converted Christian population.

The desires of communities for spaces in which to assert their identity – in other words, to make them into places – are evident in their movements in the *Voyage de saint Brendan*, the *Vie de saint Alexis*, and the *Roman de Brut*. Brendan, a founder of monasteries prior to his journey, is joyfully received by his brothers and wider community on his return to Ireland, strengthening their faith and wonder with the story of his travels and his experience of paradise, the community to which they all aspire. The place of the monastery and the Irish Christian community is even more strongly oriented towards the perfect and still intangible space of heaven. In the *Vie de saint Alexis*, meanwhile, communal consecrated space is a site for potential breakdown, due to the tensions between the groups who seek control of the saint's body. By the end of the poem, the

smaller community of Alexis's family has its aspirations for genealogical perpetuation transferred away from the gap left by their son and towards perfect space he now occupies.

The cross-comparison of these texts has opened up a variety of avenues for future research, both specific and general. Consideration of the inter-relation of place and narrative may, for example, offer a new perspective from which to view the rich and complicated manuscript tradition of the *Roman de Brut*, a narrative which is as apt a host as a neighbour to other texts. The notion of the manuscript as an enclosed space inviting reflection upon other techniques for the definition of place is one which has been beyond the scope of this study, but may prove a fruitful starting point for the study of anthologies and miscellanies. While this thesis has taken narrative writing as its route into analysis of place, there is potential, as the work of Sarah Kay and Catherine Léglu has already demonstrated, for this to be extended to didactic and lyric poetic modes, and also into work on medieval literary theory.

I wish to close this thesis with a return to Bernard Silvester's words on the poetic art's relationship to self-knowledge through the *integumentum*, and with a reflection on the tension between revelation, concealment and spatiality in this image. The cloak brought into Arthur's court in 'Du Mantel mautaillié' exposes truth by de-forming, by failing to cover its wearer perfectly. Every instance where the coat either shrinks or expands speaks of a hitherto hidden story, but the revelation of these unspoken narratives de-forms the space in which the cloak does its work. The cloak functions as a voiceless storyteller, fracturing Arthur's court from within by repeating the same shameful tale again and again, and damaging the reputation of a place which epitomizes the romance form assembled from (or parasitizing on) elements of each narrative type analysed in this study. Not for nothing does R. Howard Bloch refer to romance as 'the privileged locus of "contamination."' ¹ Because of the cloak, the court now knows itself, but the desired object poisons any relationship the courtiers may have with the outside world, and it jeopardises Arthur's ability to represent himself to others with any authority. In Bachelard's expression, at the moment the *coffret* is opened 'le dehors ne signifie plus rien' ². Opening up in the form of tale-telling can be risky, thrilling, terrifying, even embarrassing,

¹ Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, p.175.

² Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, p. 88.

but the act itself constantly renews the potential for the creation of a place among places; narrative is simultaneously a stage and a hiding place. What this thesis has attempted to demonstrate, in its representation of places, stories and storytellers, is that the *integumentum* has an interior as well as an exterior surface.

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